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FROM BOYARS TO BUREAUCRATS:

THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FOLK TALE CHARACTER ARCHETYPES IN GRIGORI ALEKSANDROV'S FOUR MUSICAL COMEDIES, 1934 – 1940

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In my master's thesis I study the society of the 1930s Soviet Union through its film culture's relation to the pre-revolutionary folk culture's traditional tale telling. My aim is to find out how the pre-revolutionary culture was reflected in the films. On the one hand the study approaches this question through the official Soviet concepts of the 1930s: the attempt to build a "new society" and through education create a whole "new man". On the other hand, it supposes that hundreds of years of folk tradition will not simply vanish by the politicians setting such ambitious political aims. Therefore the aim is to study the films, a popular tool of education and definitely a representative of the officially sanctioned culture, in order to find out what traces were left of the pre-revolutionary culture in them and how they were used in the films. The conclusions drawn on this small sample can further be used to consider what actually was new in the new society and the new man.

Both the Soviet Union and Russian folk culture are themes thoroughly studied and discussed but rarely compared. This study attempts to combine these two different discussions into a synthesis in order to arrive at new questions and conclusions based on them. Due to the large concepts discussed in the thesis, the primary sources are approached with the methods of narrative analysis and qualitative approach. The focus of the source analysis is on the films' characters because these have the greatest educational impact in the stories concerning both the ideals of the new man as well as the new society. The films chosen for the study, the four musical comedies of Grigori Aleksandrov, have been chosen mainly on the basis of availability, their known great popularity among the contemporary audiences and the fact that they are easy to study seeing that they all come from one author. The pre-revolutionary tales are mostly covered with the help of the existing literature on them.

The study shows that the pre-revolutionary culture was still vigorous in the new society's new art, and the choice to use the archetypes and motifs from the past was likely an intentional one. Despite of stressing the importance of matters being new in the Soviet Union, the ideals of the new man and the new society were still based in many ways on ideas which were already familiar to the audiences from the folk culture and could therefore be utilized in the films without creating a contradiction. Despite of the Soviet film industry having both technical and social prerequisites for becoming something genuinely new and never seen before, the old man of the past still had a lot to give to the new man of the future.

1. Introduction

> "There is no aspect of the life and activity of human society which does not reflect, in one degree or other, the experience of past stages in human culture. [...] The historian of any phenomenon will discern individual elements of the past in the new, in the contemporary; elements, of course, which in an appropriate manner have been changed, worked over and transformed".[1]

While the above quote from Yuri Sokolov was written in 1938 and might be interpreted to represent a somewhat Marxist idea of history, it is also a good summary of what was going on in the Soviet art in the 1930s. There was a paradox. On the one hand, the art was used in conjunction with the Socialist Realism to propagate the message of the new society and age following the October Revolution. It therefore concentrated not only on the past and present like the other contemporary art might have done, but also strongly on the envisioned future of the Soviet society. On the other hand and paradoxically, the pre-revolutionary culture and society were still anything but dead especially in the art. The different forms of art from music to literature utilized the pre-revolutionary traditions of folklore and even hagiography.[2] In creating the visions of the new society the art therefore, to paraphrase Sokolov, reflected the past stages of the culture, and not only in negative light to show the progress brought by the new Soviet society.

But how relevant was this paradoxical situation in one of the newest and most popular Soviet art forms, the cinema, and what was its purpose? In my master's thesis I examine this by studying the relationship between the pre-revolutionary folklore and four popular Soviet comedies directed by Grigori Aleksandrov between 1934 and 1940. The intention is to find out whether the folklore[3] was intentionally utilized, used with no clear intention, or outright banned and avoided. The motivation for this study is created by another paradox. The Soviet Union claimed to be building a new world, and the builder of the new world was to be a new man[4]. Many aspects of the old society, such as the religion, were vigorously declared obsolete and undesirable in the new society. Cinema itself was a relatively new form of art. Furthermore, it was not only entertainment but a tool for educating the people. In short, the Soviet cinema had all the social, technological and ideological reasons to plausibly take a completely new direction and create a new kind of narrative for the audiences. Yet, on the other hand, a hundreds of years of old tradition is difficult to outright eliminate, especially

1 Sokolov, 2012, 14 – 15.
2 Borev, 2008, 125.
3 Defined here to mean tales and fables and excluding, for instance, songs and poetry.
4 The term "man" is used instead of "person" or other more neutral concept, since the term "new man" or "Soviet man" is an established norm in the research literature. See for example Widdis, 2003, 8 ; Cheng, 2009 (mentioned already in the book's name) ; Petrone, 2011, 9 and Brintlinger, 2012, 21.

when there were still millions of people to whom it was part of their life. Perhaps it was not even necessary. Perhaps it was wiser to adopt the tradition and make it serve the new government's purposes. Or perhaps it was so deeply rooted in the culture that the artists unintentionally drew their inspiration from it.

These questions are easy to speculate in retrospect, but they show that this is not a subject with an obvious answer. By finding an answer to the question, a bigger question of intention may be asked: in what ways and for what purpose were the pre-revolutionary foundations used in the Soviet film culture, and in larger context in the society that endorsed these films through censorship? How was it decided? What was new in the new world and the new man when they were seen through the new entertainment?

1.1 The Thesis in Research Context

The amount of research done on the Soviet Union is extensive and ranges from monographs written while the it still existed to articles completed very recently. Both the general history of the Soviet Union and the 1930s specifically have been covered meticulously from various points of view. This is bound to create a question: what new, relevant information or even interesting data can a brief master's thesis uncover on a well researched subject like this? In this subchapter I aim to answer that and explain this thesis' relation to the previously done research.

To paraphrase Tsivjan, progress in research is measured by new questions based on old answers, not by new answers to old questions.[5] In this case "the old questions" seem to largely be how the Soviet film industry was born and functioned as a part of the Soviet society. The research remains at surprisingly technical level even in the more recent, 21st century literature. Despite of Richard Taylor noting that the modern research on Soviet popular culture has focused more on the similarities between the pre- and post-revolutionary Russia, this is not widely the case in the literature that has been available for this study, and Taylor does not really give any examples of what he means.[6] Furthermore, while the films themselves may be referred to in order to illustrate a point the author is making, the in-depth analysis of individual films or using films as primary sources for more specific questions is a subject not often touched even in the newer literature.

5 Tsivjan, 2008, 17.
6 Taylor, 2011, 202.

Such attempts are, however, occasionally seen in shorter articles[7], but rarely in monographs. A one of a kind attempt to approach the films this way in a longer work I have come across is Rimgaila Salys' 2009 presentation of the same four films of Grigori Aleksandrov that get analyzed in this thesis as well. While Salys' account is well done, even it still approaches the chosen films from a highly technical perspective, detailing, for example, how the films were born and and how they were received by the Soviet audience. This background information is invaluable for this thesis since I have not had an equal opportunity to study the original Russian sources on such questions, but it is still open for further questions approached in this thesis.

Based on this, I believe this thesis may create a new question based on these old answers. While the approach is not entirely new, it is significantly less explored. Therefore, based on the overview provided by the others, this thesis attempts also to be a continuation to what Turovskaya and Enzenberger started and what Salys has later expanded. Instead of asking how the films were born, they themselves get asked a question concerning their cultural context. While the thesis owes all of its theoretical background to the research done by the other researchers, it still attempts to come up with a new perspective for the Soviet film culture and society in this way.

In order to come up with new answers, a perspective other than the well researched film industry is necessary for the comparison. This perspective is the pre-revolutionary Russian folklore, a subject both well researched and occasionally also linked to the Soviet culture.[8] The idea of using folklore in politics, for example, is not new at all.[9] However, to my knowledge, no attempt to link this research of (mostly) literature directly with the historical research done on the films exists, though Salys touches the subject in her account. Therefore the research done on this subject is here used for understanding the nature of the folklore and then linking it to the film sources in order to find a less explored perspective on both.

1.2 The Sources and the Choices

Films, the thesis' primary sources, in general have been chosen for this study for several reasons. The first reason is that films were part of official education of the new man in the 1930s. Although

7 Enzenberger, 1993, 97. Enzenberger's article itself is one example of such research and she also refers to Maya Turovskaya's article on similar theme. Rimgaila Salys and Beth Holmgren have also written articles on Aleksandrov's film *Circus*, concentrating more on specific analysis rather than technical detailing. Nevertheless, such examples are not numerous.

8 For examples of the use of folklore in Soviet culture see Salys, 2009, 178 and Fitzpatrick, 1999, 89.

9 See Oinas, 1973 ; Oinas, 1975 & Panchenko, 2012 from the list of literature.

films were also art and entertainment, they were also infused with ideology and goals of the state because in the 1930s the state had a film monopoly.[10] Therefore their importance for the Soviet society and their value for answering the thesis' question cannot be underestimated. Of all the available educational material films have also been chosen because, as the Soviet authorities also noticed early, they could reach large audiences with a relative ease and therefore had a wide influence. While the same could be said about literature, among other things, films had the advantage of reaching also the people who either could not read (like many could not especially in the beginning of the 1930s) or who did not speak Russian, but could still understand the visual messages of the films. This again underlines their importance, and for this reason films are a valid way for studying how the pre-revolutionary folklore appeared in the new society. They clearly represented the "mainstream" instead of being a mere curiosity in the Soviet society.

Of all the available films, four Soviet comedies directed by Grigori Aleksandrov in the 1930s have been chosen. These are, in chronological order of release dates, *Happy Guys* (1934), *Circus* (1936), *Volga-Volga* (1938) and *The Radiant Path* (1940).[11] These four films have been chosen based on several criteria. The first of them, and the most rudimentary one, is availability. While there are plenty of great Soviet directors who all made influential films in the 1930s, Aleksandrov's films have been easily available for the research. Aleksandrov's films are not only easily available, but also form an easily approachable whole going from 1934 to 1940. Thus they provide a perspective to the 1930s from the earliest years of the Socialist Realism to the eve of the war. They also use mostly the same actors from one film to another and of course the director and his style remain fundamentally the same. Studying such whole is easier and also makes the interpretations of the source material more valid than studying individual films from the decade.

Aleksandrov has also been chosen because he can be considered to represent the Soviet mainstream in the 1930s. Aleksandrov's musical comedies were popular throughout the decade and thus it can be assumed that if the Soviet Union's aim for using art for educating the new people was successful, then Aleksandrov's films were an influential part of it. And even if the goal was not achieved, millions of people still saw Aleksandrov's films and were therefore subjected to this attempt.[12] Thus it can be safely said that these are not just some obscure pieces of art that only a historian could appreciate, but real cornerstones of the Soviet popular culture in the 1930s. They also still carry a

10 Turovskaya, 1993, 41 – 42.

11 The established English names for all films will be used systematically in this thesis instead of the original Russian ones.

12 *Circus* alone had a million viewers after the first week of its release and by 1939 already 40 million people had seen it. Salys, 2009, 149.

cultural meaning in modern Russia, as seen for instance from the fact that their music is still played in events such as Russia Day in 2013.[13]

It could easily be argued that using only one director's films to make conclusions on the chosen question of folklore's effect on the Soviet films is not a valid approach. One could easily counter this choice by saying that one director's films are only valid for researching that said author and to make wider conclusions the research should take into account more directors and films from the 1930s. While this argument is reasonable, it would in the end only lead to many new ways discrediting the results. While we could still choose, for instance, four directors and one film from each of them based on the concept of "mainstream" as with the Aleksandrov's films, the choice would still be arbitrary at best. Even if there are the established, well known directors whose names are repeated in the research literature, singling out the four best of them would be practically impossible. Another problem that would be faced with such approach is choosing of the films. One of the criteria for choosing Aleksandrov for this thesis is that his films form an easily approachable whole and represent the 1930s well, whereas researching multiple films from multiple directors is simply not possible within the scope of this thesis' length. The era would also become problematic: how should the films be compared with each other if one director's film was from 1932 and another's from 1939? With such questions it appears that many films from a single well known director is the best approach for answering the thesis' question. This is a valid approach also because of the nature of the Soviet film industry. Due to the censorship and ideology, the film culture, while not monolithic, was much less pluralistic than for instance Hollywood, and therefore Aleksandrov's mainstream films can be used for researching larger concepts as well.

In addition to multiple directors, another related subject of study left out of this thesis is the audiences. While according to Salmi studying only films without paying attention to their audiences is a faulty approach, in this study I believe it to be a valid choice.[14] This thesis' main question is how the pre-revolutionary Russia's culture was reflected into the new Soviet era's films. It does not attempt to find out what the audiences thought about the films or if they were effective as a tool of propaganda. Such questions regarding the audiences would only sidetrack it.

The other source for answering the question are the Russian folk tales. Claude Lévi-Strauss has proposed that folk tales have an important social value in several ways. They are a way for a society

13 Russia Day performance, 2013, 00:03:48 – 00:07:30. See list of electronic sources.
14 Salmi makes this statement several times in his book. See for example Salmi, 1993, 166.

to express itself and handle its most fundamental problems.[15] Likewise they are also conveyors of social values.[16] And while they can be seen sometimes breaking the social hierarchy (such as allowing a peasant hero to become a Tsar), in the end they still also uphold it (the peasant hero is still the only Tsar and rules over peasants who cannot all become Tsars).[17] It is therefore interesting to compare the old folk tales to the new Soviet society which certainly still had social hierarchies, values and several problems to solve, but not necessarily the same ones as in the pre-revolutionary Russia. The tales' relationship to the films essentially tells if the old folk tale purposes still functioned in the new society, and also if the same ways for solving the problems were still utilized, perhaps even directly copied.

Of all the available folklore, the folk tales have been chosen to determine the relationship between the old and the new culture because they and especially their subcategory, the so called "wonder tale", compare most closely to the films. Thus, while such influential parts of the folklore like the *Byliny* (epic songs about legendary heroes like Ilya Muromets) may be mentioned, the focus of the thesis stays firmly on the tales.

1.3 The Nature of Film and a Soviet Film as a Source

While writing history based on any sources tends to be a matter of interpretation, a film is still a rather difficult source in this sense due to its status as an art and therefore larger interpretational possibilities.[18] If we compare films to, for instance, archive documents, the difference is obvious. While the traditional text based documents also leave lots of space for interpretations, it should be kept in mind that a film is in essence also a text: it is based on a script. In addition to the text, the film has many other aspects to consider: the visual language, the music, the scenery and the choice of actors, for instance. Furthermore, a text tends to be very specific in the sense that in studying a text, the researcher can concentrate on reading it and it says something. The camera, on the other hand, captures everything it sees and despite of editing, it is perfectly possible for the viewers attention to be attracted to something completely else than what the film's makers intended.[19] Therefore interpretations made based on films should be very well argued because it is very easy to

15 Altman, 2002, 42.
16 Haney, 1999, 88.
17 Sinyavsky, 2001, 11.
18 Suoranta (2010, 300) offers a very illustrating example of at least nine different interpretations of a film that can all exist simultaneously. To name a few, there are the viewers interpretation, some other viewer's interpretation, the director's interpretation and possibly the book or other work on which the film is based on.
19 Thomson, 2008, 6.

arrive into alternative conclusions as well.

An additional problem arises when using specifically the Soviet films as a source. The Soviet films of the 1930s are without a question infused with ideology. While Aleksandrov may not have thought his work primarily as ideological propaganda but as entertainment for the people in the difficult years of the 1930s (as he later recalled[20] in the 1978 edition of Happy Guys), his films are still far from neutral. In this thesis' scope it is not relevant to argue if they are propaganda or not, but the Soviet Union's undeniably close relationship between the film artists, the state and the official ideology nevertheless creates a rather unique type of films which do not pose only the aforementioned problems of films as an artistic source, but specifically problems of the Soviet films as a source.

The main problem for interpretations made from the Soviet films is the ideology which, to a 21th century researcher, is a foreign one.[21] Furthermore, it has no reason to explain itself to such person. While a lot has been written about it, personally living under its influence would still be considerably different way of understanding it, and also an impossibility today. Yet living under its influence was exactly what millions of people did when Aleksandrov was filming his comedies. It was not a subject of study like it is today, but an everyday phenomenon. Therefore I assume that Aleksandrov, who (crudely put) "understood" it and knew that his audience would "understand" it, has hidden in his films small codes which the Soviet people would understand, but which for a modern researcher are more difficult to grasp. He could do this because his films are lengthy, artistic films as much as the *James Bond* -films or *Titanic*, and not short, simple pieces of propaganda made solely for agitation.[22] The ideology in Aleksandrov's films, unlike in these short agitation films, is much less a plainly written sermon and more a little wink of an eye here and there throughout the film.

Another fundamental problem in interpretation is that unless the film explicitly states that it does not operate with the laws of the real world, the interpreter expects its fictional world to work with these familiar laws.[23] And Aleksandrov's films do not make such statement, because the world they depict is the real world. A highly idealized and one-sided version of it, but real nevertheless. The

20 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:00:26.
21 Jenkins (1991, 35 - 36) puts this problem well by stating that while we consider our perspective to be in the "centre" and universal to everyone, that centre would from the Soviet Union's point of view be considered marginalized "bourgeois" view, whereas the Marxist-Leninist ideology would be their "centre".
22 See Amalrik, Babichenko & Polkovnikov, 1939 for an example of such short agitation film.
23 Thomson, 2008, 94.

stories take place in Soviet Union, in the context of the 1930s and with people realistic enough to be sitting in the audience as well as being depicted on the silver screen. These films are still realistic enough for even a modern viewer to occasionally forget that they depict a foreign world: the world of the past. And this further adds to the difficulty of truly getting "inside" the films' world instead of approaching it from the modern world and trying to make it fit this concept which it was not meant to fit.

The third problem in the Soviet films is caused by politics effecting them retroactively. During the Khrushchev era Aleksandrov's films were edited by removing references to Stalin, and even though in the 1970s the deleted images were restored to the films, this creates a question of their validity for researching the 1930s.[24] Some of the available films, such as *Happy Guys*, state clearly in the beginning that they are newer versions. Others, like *Volga-Volga*, still insist on being originals from the 1930s with no mention of later release date. This problem is not as big as the problem of interpretation since the later edits are minor from the thesis' point of view and mostly concern the last film, *The Radiant Path*.[25]

While film as a source has these difficulties, it is also a very abundant source and in this study's case, as I have argued above, offers a rich perspective for the subject of study. And these problems, while they exist from the beginning to the end of the thesis, are not something that would be impossible to overcome. They are simply problems to keep in mind during the analysis and the choice of methods so that they may be avoided.

1.4 The Methods of Source Analysis

In essence this thesis is a narrative analysis using qualitative approach. It is made narrative by using films, definitely narrative type of sources, as its main approach to answering its question. However, this study does not aim to be analysis of narratives (such as by trying to categorize its sources), but rather a narrative analysis, by trying to come up with a new narrative based on the ones provided by the sources and bringing into light their central themes.[26] By being qualitative, it aims to study a smaller sample, rather than a large amount of sources, in more detail and first and foremost understand the phenomenon it studies. Central to the qualitative approach is trying to form a

24 Salys, 2009, 14.
25 Ibid.
26 For further differentiating between the two approaches, see Heikkinen, 2010, 149.

synthesis, to find the sources' basic elements on which the analysis of the results is then based on.[27] Likewise, such research does not necessarily aim to use the source material to prove a hypothesis, but to instead come up with a hypothesis based on the study of sources.[28]

The main problem posed by those approaches in conjunction with the thesis' question is that they rely on interpretation. On the one hand, qualitative research's main goal is not to come up with the "truth" (which would indeed be difficult, considering the multifaceted sources such as films and questions dealing with such large concepts as culture) in the first place, but instead to provide the reader tools and a possibility to determine, if the proposed interpretation is believable.[29] In this thesis I do not intend to make it any more complicated than that. I freely admit that by researching the sources and concepts such as the aforementioned, the results of this thesis will be my interpretation of the findings. Rather than proposing a theory and then proving it with the sources, I am proposing an idea which, to my knowledge, has not been widely discussed and and in the best scenario will shed some new light on Aleksandrov's films, and through them to the Soviet art and culture as a whole. This does not make older interpretations, such as Salys proposing[30] that Aleksandrov's film *Circus* has strong Art deco influences, any less valid, because it does not aim to challenge or invalidate them.

In approaching films I will first briefly describe their historical background based on literature, after which the film is presented as a story to give the reader a good framework of its plot and characters. In the actual source analysis I will make references to certain scenes and expect the reader to know them based on this introduction. After this part the analysis will move on to studying the films' characters and comparing them and their message on the one hand to the Soviet society surrounding them and on the other hand to the folk tales' character archetypes.

The character analysis has been chosen as a method to overcome the aforementioned problem of the films' multifaceted nature as source. In order to use them as sources, it is more reasonable to study them in general only on a rather basic level and then move on to analyze one part of them more in-depth. The characters have been chosen for this purpose because, logically thinking, the most obvious conveyor of the ideological messages are the people on the silver screen. If the film is essentially a text by being based on a script, then the people expressing the script through dialogue

27 Kiviniemi, 2010, 80.
28 Eskola, 2010, 182.
29 Kiviniemi, 2010, 83.
30 See Salys, 2007.

are the simplest way for teaching the audiences a lesson. The concept of "positive hero" was an important part of the Soviet discourse and served as a role model for the ordinary people, and because films were part of the education, it is also valid to assume that the heroes in the films are positive role models for people. Likewise it is important to discuss how the villains were portrayed: who was and what represented the antithesis of the new Soviet hero? In Aleksandrov's films I have furthermore focused on only three characters in each film instead of all of them: the male and female protagonist and the antagonist. The only exception to this is *The Radiant Path* in which there are multiple minor antagonists instead of only one.

Finally, since this thesis approaches films from a certain, identifiable genre, the musical comedies, the theories used in approaching the film genres can be applied in the study. For this I am relying two different approaches as presented[31] by Rick Altman. One is the so called ritualistic approach proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss' believes that the genres are in the end born from the audiences and their purpose is to strengthen the society. Thus the motifs of the films also reflect the already existing social customs and through genres the audiences strengthen their unity and visualize their future. The other, opposing theory is Louis Althusser's ideological approach, often favored by the Marxists. Althusser believes that the genres are ways for authorities (state, industry and other such actors) to address their audiences, that is, the people. Thus the people do not, like in the ritualistic approach, seek to solve their problems through genres, but instead are led to accept the goals of the authorities.

While Altman presents these two approaches as contradicting each other, I believe both can be applied to a certain extent in the scope of this study. On the one hand Althusser's theory fits perfectly the Soviet Union where the state controlled the art and delivered propaganda to the masses through it. That is why it cannot be ignored when studying the Soviet films. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss' theory may also work if we assume that Aleksandrov was an author who, while controlled by the state, still made independent artistic decisions. Especially when comparing the folk tales to Aleksandrov's films it becomes fascinating to find out how much he uses (consciously or not) this ancient tradition which, as has been established above, derives from the most fundamental problems and social customs of the people. Therefore Aleksandrov's films shall be approached keeping both of these theories in mind and in the end finding out which of them is more relevant for these particular Soviet films.

31 Altman, 2002, 42 – 43.

When approaching the source films, it should also be noted that I will consistently refer to them as Aleksandrov's films. Thus I am representing the *auteur* school of thought, born in France in the 1950s. In this approach the most important maker of any film is its director, not the screenwriter, actors, or other people participating in it.[32] As can be expected, such way of thinking has since been questioned in film research.[33] From a historical point of view it could also be questioned because Soviet authorities did not give much credit for the directors. Instead of them, the authorities would have wanted famous writers to write the screenplays and then preferred to have the directors obediently following the script with no own initiative from their part.[34]

Despite of the criticism, I believe that Aleksandrov's films can be approached with *auteur*-thinking in the scope of this study. First and foremost this is a historical study and not a film review. I am not analyzing the films' value based on who directed them. I am also not focusing on their artistic value and therefore do not find it necessary to discuss who was more important, director Aleksandrov or actor Orlova (the actor of the female protagonist in all the films). In this study's scope the obvious answer is Aleksandrov, because Orlova was acting what Aleksandrov was directing and without him there would not have been her. Aleksandrov may be considered the author also because, contrary to the ideals of the Soviet authorities, he participated strongly in his films' scriptwriting. The final part of editing includes in the Soviet context of course the censorship, and for this thesis it has not been possible to study Aleksandrov's original scripts and compare them to the final products. This, however, is also a rather minor detail which cannot be ignored but does not destroy Aleksandrov's role as the films' author either, because what is left after the censorship is still primarily produced by Aleksandrov. Based on all this, treating these films as the products of Grigori Aleksandrov first and foremost gives more validity for comparing the films with each other and in this way also helps in distinguishing what comes from Aleksandrov and what can be traced to some other source.

This subchapter concludes the introductory chapter detailing the thesis' background and framework. In the following two chapters I will explain the theoretical background necessary for understanding the source analysis. The first chapter discusses some important concepts of the Soviet society and therefore explains much of the nature of the thesis' primary sources. The second chapter, on the other hand, details the nature of pre-revolutionary folk tales and therefore how they will be relevant for the source analysis. The four chapters following them are dedicated to analyzing each of Aleksandrov's four films in chronological order, after which conclusions will be drawn based on the

32 Thomson, 2008, 40 – 41.
33 See for example Thomson, 2008, 42 – 43 and Ahonen, 2009, 155.
34 Kenez, 2001, 128 & 131. For an example of this mentality see Bulgakova, 1994, 65.

subjects raised during the research process.

2. The Soviet Perspective

The decade of 1930s in the Soviet history was neither one monolithic entity, nor an island standing on its own in the middle of history. It was a wildly varying decade of destroying the old, building and then rebuilding new, of social upheavals, of years of prosperity and years of terror and shortages, and also of genuine enthusiasm for building the new world and reaching the bright future promised by the ideology. This all is reflected to the thesis' primary sources and together gives them a definite Soviet perspective which cannot be ignored if they are to be used as sources in the first place. Therefore this chapter exists to discuss five large concepts which I consider to be the most relevant building blocks of the Soviet perspective in this thesis. These will be covered by moving from large concepts to smaller concepts, and in some cases they are largely interrelated.

The first two, closely linked concepts are the abstract ideas of the new man and the new society. These were factors defining the nature of the whole decade in the 1930s and before it. While the thesis is more interested in finding out how they were reinforced through the films rather than what they were in-depth, they still need to be discussed in order to understand their impact on the message the films were trying to convey to the audiences. An especially relevant information here is also what I have chosen to call “the old man”, the ordinary Soviet person in the era and the target of education. This is important because the nature of the audiences naturally defined the nature of the films, otherwise they would not have been effective for education.

The following three, much more concrete concepts are related to the Soviet film industry itself and define both on what it was based and what its role in the society was. The first of them is the Russian and later Soviet film before the 1930s, because many features defining the films of the 1930s were based either on the pre-revolutionary films or the modernist experimentation in art of the 1920s. Following this, of course, is the concept of the Soviet film in the 1930s, because this is the era represented by Aleksandrov's films. Here the question of Soviet art also becomes relevant because through the doctrine of the Socialist Realism the Soviet Union in the 1930s developed its own, very distinctive style of art which naturally was also reflected on the films strongly. Despite of this, an artist in the Soviet Union was still an artist and had ways to make his or her voice heard through the art. While common features are easy to find between the films of different directors, these sources still cannot be simply approached as one big block called “Soviet films”. Therefore

the fifth and final concept is the role of a film director and Aleksandrov in specific in the 1930s.

2.1 The New and the Old Man

While the importance of the new man to the Soviet society of the era cannot be underestimated, Mikhail Heller goes as far as to claim that no matter which perspective is chosen to examine the Soviet history, in the end it is still always the history of the formation of a new man.[35] While Heller is exaggerating, there is truth in the statement. In the films the idea of creating a new man has an especially great influence, as the films were part of the education and thus an important part of the formation of this new man. The concept of new man was therefore a defining factor in the films' content and especially their characters, the "positive heroes" and their opposites, which are central for this study. Therefore I will in this subchapter address the concept of new man but focus only on the aspects that are relevant to this study since the phenomenon itself is naturally much larger than what can be reasonably addressed in this thesis' scale.

The idea of new man in the Soviet Union was based on the theories of Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. From Locke the Soviet authorities borrowed the concept of "Tabula rasa", the human mind as a blank slate which can be formed with stimuli.[36] From Rousseau, on the other hand, were received ideas such as that man's nature can be changed through political education.[37] Both are very relevant for the use of films in propaganda. Naturally important for the Soviet authorities was also Marx. In his opinion the change was tied to a person's class, and since the status of a class can change, so can the nature of the people.[38] Ivan Pavlov's theories of conditioning were also eagerly adopted but rather than dogs it was applied for educating people.[39] It can therefore be surmised that the phenomenon had acknowledged roots deeper than in the October Revolution, but these examples show well from the education's point of view on what these roots were based: the changing of the human being's nature through external means more than having it happen on its own.

While the new man's roots are deep in history[40] and there have been many attempts of creating such

35 Heller, 1988, 48.
36 Cheng, 2009, 8.
37 Cheng, 2009, 10 – 11.
38 Cheng, 2009, 13.
39 Cheng, 2009, 24.
40 Heller (1988, 31) suggests that a new man in this sense was envisioned already by Plato, whereas Laaksonen's (2006, 370) description of the Renaissance era's new ideal hero fits the ideals of a 1930s Soviet hero very well.

ideal human being, the Soviet Union's attempt is made special by the fact that it was the first nation in history to try such project in large and long term scale.[41] This project, however, was not something that continued from the days of Lenin all the way to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as one and unified continuum. Instead it was a goal that changed its shape according to the needs of each government and time. While the basic goal remained the same – to create a new, socialist man who would then build the new, socialist world –, it is evident already by comparing the ideals of the new man right after the revolution to the ideals of the new man in the 1930s that changes were being made. Therefore when in this thesis the concept of "new man" is used, it refers specifically to the ideals of the new man in the 1930s, and even then it is not a single, immutable entity for the whole decade.

There are nevertheless some generalizations that can be made and applied also to the decade in question. Andrei Sinyavsky, for example, defines the new man as a person dedicated to the creation of the new society, a man of action rather than a man of words, and even when he is alone, he is still part of a bigger "whole" (for instance his class or his society). He is not an individual who would be interested in his own gain, but rather works for the benefit of the greater good.[42] Such goal of working for the greater good has been noted by Cheng as well.[43]

An ordinary old man, on the other hand, was a peasant. Throughout the 1930s, vast majority of the Soviet people lived in the countryside: the city dwellers made up 18 % of the population in 1926 and in 1939 still only 33 %.[44] Furthermore, the people in the cities often had peasant origins and peasant mentality, because they were only one generation apart from their roots in the countryside.[45] From the thesis' perspective this information is important because of the question of audience. As the Soviet authorities wanted to educate the people to become new men, they naturally had to know the people they were educating. This was not self-explanatory, but a problem which they had to face right after the revolution and learn to deal with through trial and error.

One example of the trial and error is recounted by Richard Taylor when in the 1920s the Bolsheviks were touring the country in so called agitation trains. These trains were filled with ideological and educational material, and even painted with pictures representing the revolution and the new world. They found out that while these machines were impressive, they were also alien and too abstract for

41 Cheng, 2009, 22.
42 Sinyavsky, 1990, 116.
43 Cheng, 2009, 33.
44 Gill, 1990, 25 & Fitzpatrick, 1999, 70.
45 Salys, 2009, 316.

the majority of the average peasants they tried to reach. Proverbially speaking the peasants lived in a completely different world than the agitators and saw in the material connotations which their authors had not even though about. Taylor brings up an example of a riding Cossack being painted in the train. When the peasants saw this artistic depiction of the revolutionary hero, they were more interested in the Cossack's horse and amused because it had been shod wrongly in the picture.[46] This kind of miscommunication happening in the education was a problem which the authorities had to and tried to overcome in the 1930s. One solution may have very well been to use the folklore which was already familiar to the peasant majority.

Furthermore, the old man was largely illiterate and generally not very educated. Estimates vary, but they all point towards such conclusion. In 1926 only 57 % of the Soviet population between the ages 9 and 49 were literate, and as late as 1939 literate people made up 81 % of the whole population.[47] Converted into numbers this means that in the 1920s there were approximately 140 million illiterate people in the country, which explains why music and other forms of propaganda (films, naturally, too) not reliant on text were so popular right after the revolution.[48] The illiteracy was especially the countryside's problem. In 1926 the rate of literacy in cities was 81 %.[49] In 1939, this number had increased to 94 %.[50] While the number of literate people especially in the cities rose steadily, a medium not relying on the target group's ability to read was an essential part of the Soviet propaganda throughout the 1930s. This is true even if we don't take into account the fact that the films were also a very popular form of entertainment otherwise as well.

Illiteracy was not the only problem for the Soviet authorities, but the general lack of education of the populace as well. Crudely put, the people would know how to storm and capture a factory from its former owners, but not how to run it after they were put in charge of it.[51] Although the education level was paid much attention to in the 1930s, changing the nature of the people through it was still an altogether different matter. Sinyavsky notes cynically that after getting educated, a peasant could know everything about the machine parts, but culturally and intellectually he or she was still a peasant.[52] The Soviet novelists even made fun of this phenomenon of quickly socially advancing people being unqualified for their positions and created an archetype character of a barely literate

46 Taylor, 1985, 195.
47 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 70.
48 Edmunds, 2004, 105.
49 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 70.
50 Ward, 1993, 212 – 213.
51 Joravsky, 1985, 93.
52 Sinyavsky, 1990, 145 – 146.

peasant turned into an official who knew only lots of abbreviations and misunderstood Bolshevik slogans.[53] Thus it can be surmised that even late in the 1930s when the population in the cities had increased and the education level was higher than in the beginning of the decade, the percentages do not tell the whole truth. There were still many people in the political education's target group who would recognize the tales and other aspects of the peasant culture despite of having a new title.

2.2 The New Society

> "The overall climate of the period can be encapsulated in the following features: urbanization, industrialization, collectivization, purges and show trials, the spread of education, and often demagogic depreciation of culture, the mobilization of energies and people, increasing criminalization of many aspects of life, hectic creation of administrative structures and so on. All these, and more, belong to the tumultuous 1930s".[54]

The new man was to build the new society, but what exactly entailed the concept of "new society" was a matter of debate and subject to change. Lewin gives an adequate summary in the quote above, but others like it might well be written too, because the term in this decade alone was extremely multifaceted. Therefore the concept is discussed in this subchapter, with focus being on what the new society was specifically in the 1930s and on what it was based.

In the decade following the revolution, the building of the new world and abandoning the old one occasionally took rather radical forms. Old social values, such as matters sexuality, family, and the role of women in society, were reconsidered and changed considerably. A Finnish song from 1928, for example, noted the new liberal marriage tendencies by stating in its first stanza: "The love is free in Russia: You will get anyone you meet to be your wife. Where formerly was Petrograd[55] is now Leningrad. From there you will get documents for marriage and divorce".[56] Renaming was also a popular way to show the distinction between the new and old world. Not only towns and cities received new names, but people too. Common names such as Nikolai and Ivan went out of favor because the former belonged to the last Tsar, Nicholas II, and the latter was too common. New popular names, such as Viktor and Aleksandr, were taken from the old aristocracy, and naturally Vladimir also gained popularity to honor Lenin. But there were also completely new names. To celebrate the new world's achievements, a boy could, for instance, be called "Traktor" and a girl

53 Emerson, 2008, 201.
54 Lewin, 2005, 70.
55 The name of St. Petersburg from 1914 to 1924.
56 Vuorisola, 1928. Writer's translation from Finnish to English.

"Elektrifikatsiya".[57] These kind of choices may later seem strange, but they reflect the general enthusiasm and perhaps a certain level of confusion in society following the ousting of the old government. The revolution had happened and a new government was in charge to show the people a new direction: where to go from there?

During Stalin's era there was still genuine enthusiasm, but there had also been over a decade for the initial confusion to be dealt with. Due to this, many things again changed, but rather than going into a completely new direction, they went back to how they were before the revolution. Taking revolutionary names stopped and people were not longer keen on naming their children or themselves with names resembling Stalin or the other leaders.[58] By the time the aforementioned Finnish song was sung, the liberal time in the social matters was already ending, and the more conservative family values were adopted again in the end of the 1920s.[59] Homosexuality became a crime again shortly after that, in the year 1934.[60] The revolutionary school education returned back to the old system where the teacher's role was to convey information and the students were to absorb it.[61] Thus it can be said that in the 1930s the new society started resembling the old society much more than the authorities speaking for it would perhaps have wanted to admit.

But the new society in the 1930s had something genuinely new too. Ideologically the biggest new thing was Stalin's abandoning of the world revolution and persecuting the old Bolsheviks still speaking in favor of it. In a way this can be understood: over a decade had passed since the October Revolution, and yet the world revolution had not happened. The Soviet Union had become a nation among the nations. As a nation it did not have many friends, seeing that many foreign powers had supported the Whites instead of the Bolsheviks in the civil war. Furthermore, it did not have much industrial capacity either when compared to its real and perceived enemies. In 1910 the heavy industry of Russia had still been the fourth or fifth largest in the world.[62] In the 1930s this was not enough anymore and thus one of the biggest driving forces of the era's new world was achieving the advanced state of industrialization, a transformation of the country from an agricultural peasant society into an industrialized urban society.

But the industrialization was not achieved easily. When the authorities saw that not everything was

57 Sinyavsky, 1990, 194 – 195.
58 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 83 – 84.
59 Evans Clements, 1985, 229 – 230.
60 Ward, 1993,198
61 Grant, 1979, 113 – 114.
62 McNeill & McNeill, 2006, 358.

always going according to the plan, an explanation was needed. The then logical explanation was a conspiracy.[63] The reason for failures were the saboteurs, spies and wreckers: the enemies of the Soviet state trying to undermine the building of the new Soviet society. Being afraid of spies became especially prevalent mentality towards the end of the decade, as the growing strength and boldness of hostile nations of Japan and Germany worried the Soviet authorities more and more.[64] Related to this was also expecting the inevitable war with the enemies of the Soviet Union. But the enemy was not only a foreign spy. The enemy could as well be the representatives of the old world: "the Old Believers, Sect members [and] Kulaks" as they are called in the beginning of Dovzhenko's *Aerograd*.[65] These domestic enemies were dangerous, because they could hide and "mask" themselves as good Soviet citizens.[66] Thus the duty of loyal Soviet citizens was to unmask these dangerous enemies.[67] Aleksandrov does not explore this theme strongly in his films, but his colleague Pyryev did in his film *The Party Card*, along with other directors of the era, and Aleksandrov's own villains reflect this aspect of the society to a certain extent.

Another vital part of the era, especially in the early 1930s, was collectivization, which had influence over the whole decade. It was necessary for the aforementioned industrialization campaign by essentially making the peasants bear the burden of the country's modernization's expenses.[68] This brings up the final feature of new society worth considering in the scope of this subchapter: the relationship between the cities and the countryside. Part of the ideology behind the collectivization was to make the peasant into a civilized Soviet citizens who would not support the "backwards" views anymore, but would become the builder of the new world.[69] Seeing the countryside as dark, untamed and uncivilized was part of the Soviet ideology and modernizing it was a prominent goal in building the new world at that time. This was not a new phenomenon, however. Already in the medieval Russia it was the cities that were seen as the outposts of civilization against the vast, uncharted expanses of the Russian lands. The binary oppositions was very prominent then too. The cities were protected by God and saints of Christianity, whereas the area beyond the city walls was unknown, ruled by pagan gods and demons.[70] There was also an inherent mistrust between the

63 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 22.
64 Ward, 1993, 133.
65 Dovzhenko, 1935, 00:01:09 – 00:01:25
66 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 22.
67 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 116.
68 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 4.
69 Ward, 1993, 65.
70 Emerson, 2008, 26. Such division was not unique to Russia, but had an ancient past in Western Europe as well. The English word "pagan" itself is derived from Latin word *paganus*, which can also mean "country-dweller". This word was used already during the latter years of the Roman empire where Christianity was strong in the cities whereas the countryside still belonged largely to the *pagani*. See Brown, 2001, 39.

people of the cities and the countryside already during the reign of Peter the Great, when "Russia in effect became two countries [the countryside and the cities]".[71]

In this way the Soviet new society continued this ages old tradition, but the authorities had another, more practical reason for it too. The cities were the bases of the Bolshevik power since the revolution, whereas in the countryside their support was considerably smaller.[72] Sometimes it might have been even impossible for the people in the countryside to support the Bolsheviks, since there were people who, even after the revolution, had never heard of Lenin.[73] If the Bolsheviks were to consolidate their rule in their country and to build their new society, they needed to reach also the vast majority of the people living in the countryside. For this they needed a method. They chose to combine education and art, and not just any art, but a then relatively new art form which was also to become a new art in service of the new world: the film.

To summarize the most important observations for the thesis about the new man and the society, we can say three things. First, while the new man was meant for building the new society, his exact definition depended on each era in the Soviet history. Therefore the new man of the 1930s was different from the new man in the 1920s, and must be treated as such also in this thesis' context. Second, the “old” man was most likely illiterate and a peasant. Therefore appealing to this kind of person was vital for the Soviet propaganda and thus the nation's film industry as well. Third, the new society of the 1930s, while having some distinctive features separating it from the past, also had resemblance to the old society and thus the past cannot be ignored when studying it.

2.3 From Curiosity to Cultural Industry: The Films Between 1896 – 1928

Film as an art in the 1930s could be called both a new art form, but also a new art. It was a new art form because the cinema itself was a relatively new invention in the 1930s: The Lumiére brothers had held their first show in Paris only at the end of 1895. The Soviet cinema of the 1930s, however, could also be called new art, because the Soviet art in the 1930s developed a distinct style that separated it from both its pre-revolutionary predecessor as well as the art of the 1920s. To better understand the nature and the role of the films serving as the primary sources of this thesis, I shall in this and the next subchapter discuss the birth and development of film culture in pre-

71 Emersin, 2008, 27.
72 Kenez, 2001, 91.
73 Heller, 1988, 92.

revolutionary Russia and Soviet Union, the new mainstream art in the 1930s from the films' point of view as well as the role of the films in the new society. In this case the long term perspective from the beginning to the 1930s is necessary since the system built in the 1930s was based on the previous two decades and cannot be properly explained without covering its foundations too.

Russia before the revolution may have been "backwards" in some ways when compared to European countries or the United States, but film industry was not one of those ways. The pre-revolutionary Russia was one of the world's leading film industries and the new technology was embraced enthusiastically by the Russian population. Films were welcomed especially well in the towns, where they surpassed the old theaters latest by the 1916 when movie tickets were sold twice as much as traditional theater tickets.[74] The new form of entertainment was not popular only among the common people, but Tsar Nicholas II also found the new technology very interesting and liked to watch films.[75] In this he was similar to his successors Lenin and Stalin who both saw much potential in film, and especially in Stalin's case were also fond of watching films themselves. The state's close, even personal interest in film industry was nothing new in Russia after revolution or in the 1930s.

The first film in Russia premiered already in 1896[76]: less than a year after the Lumiéres had their first show in Paris.[77] The Russians adopted the filmmaking technology soon after this, and thus the first long, fictional film depicting the legend of Stenka Razin was completed in 1908.[78] Stites makes an interesting observation here, stating that the film about Stenka Razin was a great commercial success precisely because it was based on a well known folk legend and therefore was already familiar to the audiences.[79] The choice of subject must have felt natural for the filmmakers in the 1900s who still were not sure of what they were doing with the new technology or what kind of stories could be told with it. Yet there is no reason to assume that Aleksandrov would have overlooked the potential of using these same, familiar stories as themes in his films some 30 years later when the state's goal with the film was to reach the audiences of the millions.

74 Stites, 1992, 30. As a complementary note Reeves (2004, 47) claims the films had become the town dwellers' favorite entertainment already by the year 1914.
75 Reeves, 2004, 2.
76 While the year is constant, there are some differing opinions on when exactly this happened. Reeves (2004, 1) claims July, whereas Kenez (2001, 10) says May. The arrival still obviously happened soon after the premier in Paris.
77 Stites, 1992, 28. While this is remarkably short time, it should also be noted that before reaching St. Petersburg the invention of the Lumiéres had already been seen in London, Vienna, and New York, and later that year it spread to Egypt, India and Japan. See Reeves, 2004, 1.
78 Piispa, 2009, 21. The first Russian film, on the other hand, was completed a few years earlier, in 1906. See Stites, 1992, 28.
79 Stites, 1992, 31.

Russia soon became one of the largest producers of the films in the world, producing as many as 500 fictive films in its best year 1916, even despite of the ongoing war.[80] Nevertheless, the foreign films were also always popular and in 1908 still accounted for 90 % of all the films in Russia.[81] The state played a role in the pre-revolutionary Russia's film culture like in the 1930s Soviet Union, but its grip on the industry was not nearly as strong.[82] Censorship existed, and while it was still quite loose, the fear of films having bad influence on the people was nevertheless a feature already present in the pre-revolutionary Russia and only amplified later in the Soviet Union.[83]

After the October Revolution, the role of the film in the society started slowly changing. Several studies on the Soviet films include a famous quote from Lenin, which can be paraphrased by stating that of all the different art forms available, film is the most important one for the Bolsheviks.[84] These studies also correctly note that Lenin did not mean by his statement to elevate the film above all arts as an art, but as a tool. The Bolsheviks knew that they had to establish a new regime and to stay in power, they had to reach the masses. Lenin, unlike Marx, was even worried about the working class not being able to achieve the revolution and class consciousness on its own, but instead turning into a new, petty-bourgeois class only interested in its own benefits like better work hours and wages.[85] The revolution and the new world had to be brought from the top to the bottom of the society, and for this purpose the film was the best thing the era's technology could offer to the Bolsheviks. It was also an ideologically suitable tool, which was not completely irrelevant, seeing that at the same time “bourgeois” forms entertainment such as opera suffered at least at first some hardships under the new regime.[86]

Taylor mentions that the film was not good only for reaching the illiterate people, but it could also easily reach the people representing the multiple different lingual and ethnic backgrounds of the vast country.[87] While he is undoubtedly correct concerning the illiterate and the people speaking different languages (which would not matter, since there was no sound film until in the 1930s), the

80 Piispa, 2009, 30.
81 Piispa, 2009, 21.
82 For instance, during the First World War films were used on inspire patriotic feelings, but most producers still concentrated on entertainment rather than propaganda. Stites, 1992, 36.
83 Reeves, 2004, 3.
84 See for example Taylor, 1985, 190 ; Taylor & Christie, 1994, 202 and Pesonen, 1998, 215. Although it should also be noted that Reeves (2004, 48) questions the authencity of this quote, because its source, People's Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, is not entirely trustworthy according to him. Truthful or not, the importance of the films for the Bolsheviks is still difficult to deny.
85 Reeves, 2004, 44.
86 Luukkanen, 2004, 190.
87 Taylor, 1985, 191.

idea of film being uniformly good for reaching different ethnic groups seems exaggerated. Ethnicity is tied closely to one's culture and culture is tied to how a person sees the world. We have already noticed that the Bolsheviks had trouble with reaching the peasants with visual art, not understanding that more important than their revolutionary hero painting was the hero's horse's shoes. Nevertheless, Taylor's other point of the benefits of using films certainly is true and made the Bolsheviks look good in the eyes of different cultural groups too: the fact that films were new technology and by using them, the Bolsheviks could also create an image of themselves as the bringers of development and the new kind of life.[88] As a technical product film was also more reliable than, for example, theater where each play was to a certain extent unique. A film, once it was filmed, stayed always the same and the authorities therefore had a better idea of what was being shown to their targeted masses all across the country.[89]

One additional benefit, that had been true already in the pre-revolutionary Russia, was that the film was a socially equal form of entertainment: it was popular among all classes of society.[90] Enjoying it did not demand much from its audience and even the less educated workers could enjoy it.[91] This is not to say that the film was everyone's entertainment. It was popular especially in cities because cities had places where films could be seen more easily than in the countryside. But thinking from the Bolsheviks' point of view, this does not make the film any less valuable as a political tool. It only means that the people living in the countryside should also be given means to watch films. And these means were provided at latest in the 1930s, seeing that even if the collective farms did not have much money to spend, they still often managed to find enough funds to purchase a film projector.[92]

The large scale use of film in propaganda after the revolution is tied to the (then relatively new) concept of mass society. This was a trend going all over the world, and the propaganda value of the films was not understood only in the Soviet Union or other dictatorships. On the contrary, the politicians in democratic countries as well realized very well that to reach the audiences with their message, they had to utilize the newly developed forms of mass communication such as films. Therefore similar ideas of the films' propaganda potential were expressed in democratic countries as later in Nazi Germany.[93] The democratic countries were also aware of the possibility of other

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Stites, 1992, 30.
91 Reeves, 2004, 2.
92 Kenez, 2001, 119.
93 Reeves, 2004, 5.

democratic countries trying to influence their citizens with this new form of entertainment, and thus in Britain the film industry was controlled from 1928 onwards after concerns of American Hollywood films penetrating the country's markets and propagating the American values to its citizens were expressed.[94] This is the same year when Stalin started establishing his regime's power in the Soviet Union and doing exactly the same by drastically reducing the amount of foreign films allowed into the country's cinemas and taking a much tighter grip of the domestic film industry than before.

While Britain attempted to utilize the films for propaganda, the attempt was concealed. This was not the case in the Soviet Union, where propaganda was a visible part of the new society.[95] This is because the word "propaganda" in the Soviet context is different from the usual, modern Western definition of the word. The modern Western definition of propaganda has a negative connotation. Propaganda is linked with extraordinary times such as war, and it can also connote outright lying. The propaganda is something coming from "the enemy". Propaganda in the Soviet context, on the other hand, was an ordinary, neutral or even a positive word. This is evident for instance in Sokolov's book from 1938 where he describes the importance of the folklore by saying: "[...]what a vastly important artistic force this [the folklore] is in the *propagandizing* of the resplendent ideas of Communism, what a great place folklore occupies in Soviet socialist culture."[96]

While the Bolsheviks realized the importance of using culture and entertainment in political education, their attempts for most of the 1920s were not successful. Their biggest failure regarding the cinema in retrospect was that they could not fully take control of the industry, or even the art in general. The main reason for this was the NEP-policy in effect for the most of the 1920s. NEP itself had little to do with the culture or films: it was an economic policy trying to stabilize the country torn by the revolution and the subsequent civil war. Ideologically it took a step away from the revolutionary visions and gave room for practices resembling the pre-revolutionary Russia, such as (limited) private enterprises. But partly because of this relative freedom, the NEP era was also an era of searching for the future's direction. Culturally it was time of experimentation and in art this was seen by having highly experimental Avant-Garde style become prominent.

Avant-Garde produced many artists and pieces of art that were (and in certain cases still are) artistically impressive. In the film's case this was even necessary, as the technology was new and

94 Ibid.
95 Reeves, 2004, 43.
96 Sokolov, 2012, 39. Italics added.

many of the old Russia's experienced filmmakers had left the country after the revolution, taking with them also much of the material and resources necessary for filming.[97] Famous film directors such as Sergei Eisenstein and Alexander Dovzhenko started their career in this era. Eisenstein especially is still remembered from his pioneering use of the montage technique. But Avant-Gardist experimentation also had much more abstract incarnations than the montage. A ballet could be experimental by having the dancers dress as flying lizards.[98] A short agitation film, on the other hand, declared in 1924 that an interplanetary revolution would soon be likely and depicted a Red Army soldier Kominternov flying to Mars to vanquish the capitalists in there.[99] The invention of montage made some of the experimenting directors go as far as to declare that in the future the films would not need actors, because the film's message could be conveyed much better by using the montages than by having an actor express it by acting.[100]

All this was something completely different from what the film culture in the 1930s was to become, and also the very reason for why it became like it did. It can only be speculated how far away these experimentations were from an ordinary Soviet citizen's everyday world and how comprehensible they were to him or her. The result of experimentation and direction searching was that while today we still may see such films as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* as the great cornerstones of the Soviet film history, the ordinary Soviet person did not understand the Avant-Gardist art's message.[101] Furthermore, the ordinary Soviet person was not even nearly as interested in the revolution or the experimentation as the artists and the authorities would have hoped. The ordinary Soviet person was still that ordinary Russian who had gone to the cinema in the pre-revolutionary era to watch comedies and dramas and to be entertained. Some filmmakers understood this and, under the relative freedom of the NEP era, kept filming these entertaining movies, which turned out to still be very popular among the audiences.[102] But in order for the propaganda to be effective, this was not enough: it was necessary for the authorities and hence all the artists to understand it, and this understanding was a major part of the change that happened in the 1930s.

The foreign films remained popular for the same reasons as the domestic entertainment films. While the Soviet authorities, concerned for the maintaining of revolutionary ideology, did not necessarily find the foreign films nearly as amusing as the ordinary people did, they still had to face the

97 Reeves, 2004, 52.
98 Stites, 1992, 39.
99 Khodataev ; Komisarenko & Merkulov, 1924.
100 Tsivjan, 2008, 12.
101 Kenez, 2001, 93.
102 Reeves, 2004, 74.

realities. The foreign films made ten times more money than the Soviet films, and the state did not have necessary funds to start a domestic production large enough to compete with the foreign films.[103] And even if they did have the money, the film industry had already grown so powerful that nationalizing it could not have been done in one stroke without angering the producers and thus considerably hampering the production of the people's favored entertainment. Although the decision on nationalization was made in theory as early as 1919, in practice this was a far cry from the tight control the state had over the industry in the 1930s.[104] Instead the film industry's situation in this regard started changing only from 1928 onwards and the development culminated only as late as 1938.[105]

But even if the Bolsheviks had the necessary money and had managed to nationalize the film industry perfectly in one stroke already in the early 1920s, they were still lacking something important to truly start their own film industry: a plan which, on the other hand, became a central theme of the 1930s. The NEP era was an era of searching and experimenting, and thus no real plan on the state's own film industry was ever truly successfully implemented during it. Projects were started but they lacked coordination and skill. One such project, for example, was led by Lenin's wife with no real training or expertise for overseeing such work.[106] Likewise the central control was lacking and the local authorities acted on their own initiative, drafting their own plans.[107]

This lack of proper planning and central control is an important difference between the film industry of the 1920s and the 1930s and the most fundamental reason for why the Soviet films did not properly serve the purpose the state would have wanted them to serve in the 1920s. It might also have been the reason for why the change between the decades was so drastic and happened so quickly: Stalin and the other Soviet leaders, having lived through the years of NEP themselves, must have understood this as well and wanted to correct the mistakes made in the previous decade. On the other hand, the 1920s did not pave the way to them only by having them learn from these mistakes, but also in practical sense. It should not be underestimated that, successful or not, the nationalization of the film industry started and was attempted throughout the 1920s and the state's film monopoly in the 1930s rested on the foundations laid in those unsuccessful efforts. With such foundations it was much easier to start creating a new art instead of only a new art form.

103 Hagener, 2007, 164.
104 Reeves, 2004, 53 & Taylor, 1985, 193.
105 Hagener, 2007, 164.
106 Reeves, 2004, 52.
107 Reeves, 2004, 53.

2.4 The Socialist Realism and the Film Industry in the 1930s

The new art in the context of the 1930s is best described with the words the contemporaries themselves used: "Socialist Realism". In order to use the films and other forms of art as a tool of education, they had to be unified. The art in general needed a doctrine, a mold that would give the art the kind of form the authorities wanted and had been lacking in the 1920s. The answer was the doctrine of Socialist Realism, developed in 1932 and declared the official and only successor of the Russian literature in the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.[108] From the literature it spread to other forms of culture, soon becoming the official and only way of being a recognized artist in the Soviet Union.

While the Socialist Realism wanted to give the art a new direction, different from the 1920s, it had something in common with the now detested Avant-Garde too. As Hagener notes, Avant-Garde was "characterized by an unconditional sense of utopianism that was directed solely at the future".[109] This was one of the most distinctive feature of the Socialist Realism as well. The Socialist Realism was not realism depicting the life as it was, but realism depicting the future as it was going to be. Thus, Fitzpatrick notes, if there was an empty ditch, the Socialist Realism would depict it as the canal that it was going to be in the future.[110] Furthermore its distinctive features were "mandatory optimism, aesthetic conservatism, moral puritanism and *partiinost*, the last somewhat barbarously translated as 'party mindedness' and generally meaning enthusiasm for things Bolshevik."[111] Socialist Realism also differed from the earlier Soviet art in that it somewhat abandoned the importance of the revolution and instead of masses, started focusing on the individual person's growth into becoming a better socialist.[112] One of the major impacts of the latter in the films was that in the 1930s they started again having clear, identifiable protagonists, whereas in the 1920s it had been much more common to depict masses as the driving force of the plot.

With such description it could be argued that the Socialist Realism was in many ways returning to the pre-revolutionary traditions. Moral puritanism for example could be seen as a counter attack against the 1920s thoughts on sexuality that were very liberal[113] even by today's standards, and thus a clear step back towards the old society's values and a step away from building a completely new, revolutionary world. Mandatory optimism's main purpose may have been reinforcing the

108 Emerson, 2008, 192.
109 Hagener, 2007, 175.
110 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 9.
111 Clark, 2011a, 3.
112 Salys, 2009, 6.
113 See Cheng, 2009, 38.

enthusiasm for building a new society, but even in that the Socialist Realism resembles more stability than a new revolution. It should be remembered that by 1934 the Soviet people had suffered through a lot within the last two decades. First the war had shaken Russia, then the revolution had overthrown the old regime, closely followed by a brutal civil war. The Bolsheviks had tried to stabilize the country with NEP, but such attempts had ended at latest in the 1928 and the beginning of Stalin's first five year plan and collectivization which changed the lives of millions. The Socialist Realism could not afford to be anything but stabilizing after all this. The art, while it now served the state's purposes more strictly than ever after revolution, was still a way for the people to escape the reality and have even a momentary respite from all of this. Such escapism was especially relevant in film industry, the one form of entertainment equally easy to understand for everyone and equally enjoyed by different classes of the society.

While the uniformity and the ideological purity of the art improved, the amount of produced films drastically decreased in the 1930s. There are several reasons for this and not all of them are related to the Socialist Realism and the new direction of the culture, though the majority are.[114] To start with numbers, we remember that in pre-revolutionary Russia's best year, 1916, 500 fictive films alone were produced. In the year 1928 only 128 films were produced and in the year 1933 the number was but 35.[115] Although the numbers began increasing after this, they did not reach those of the previous decades anymore.[116] Another interesting statistic is the length of the process of making a film. In the 1920s a film could be produced in several months, whereas in the 1930s it could take more than 14 months.[117]

Though the numbers implicate a clear trend, they may still be questioned.[118] Nevertheless, they cannot be explained away easily and imply a certain change typical for the 1930s. One reason for this change was the now stricter censorship, which complicated the process of filmmaking considerably. Censorship in the 1930s was not just some official examining the film and cutting parts of it out because of improper content. Instead censorship was present in filmmaking from the first idea and sketch to the final product in form of auxiliary directors working alongside with the

114 One major reason not related to the new direction of art was the lack of technology and factories producing the materials necessary for a self-sufficient film industry. See Kenez, 2001, 118.
115 Kenez, 2001, 108.
116 Ibid.
117 Kenez, 2001, 121.
118 The comparison is questionable when considering that many films in the 1920s were short agitation films, lasting between 5 – 30 minutes (Reeves, 2004, 55 & Taylor, 1985, 193 – 194) and even more questionable when considering that Russia's first fictional film in 1908 was shot in only one day (Stites, 1992, 31). With the improved technology more complex and longer films obviously became possible.

real director.[119] Also, while the so called negative censorship (the things that should not be said) was still practiced as it had been during the pre-revolutionary era, the censorship in Soviet Union also included the positive censorship: adhering to the code of what *should* be said.[120] What should be said, on the other hand, was not constant set of ideals for the whole decade but followed what the authorities considered important at any given time. Thus it is logical that drafts of the script were written and rewritten, the new versions of the film in progress were made and edited, and at any point the director could be told that his film was canceled. A famous case of the latter happening would be Eisenstein's film *Bezhin Meadow*: a well known director making a film of the well known legend of the young political martyr Pavlik Morozov and still not getting permission to continue.

The highest author of films was Stalin himself. He found the films interesting, examined scripts and made suggestions based on them.[121] This did not concern only some individual films that he found personally interesting: from the 1933 onwards he and the members of the Politburo would examine all the produced films before they receoved permission to be released.[122] Despite of Kenez cynically noting[123] that Stalin did not understand anything about films, his influence on the final products cannot be denied. In Aleksandrov's case, for example, the final film in the examined quartet from the 1930s got its name from Stalin. Originally the film was called *Zolushka* (Russian equivalent for *Cinderella,* a very fitting name for such film), but Stalin did not like it. He believed that such name, derived from the old folk tale, resembled too much the old world and not the new one which the films were building. Thus he gave some suggestions for a new name, and *The Radiant Path* was finally chosen.[124]

One could of course ask what does this matter. What difference does it make for us to know that Stalin changed the name of one of Aleksandrov's films? While the example itself might not seem very important, it still illustrates just how high in the hierarchy the censorship would go in this era.[125] Knowing bureaucracy, it should be assumed that before reaching Stalin any given film must have gone through many steps and each of those steps could have returned it a few steps back by

119 Kenez, 2001, 127.
120 Emerson, 2008, 192.
121 Bulgakova, 1994, 65.
122 Salys, 2009, 23.
123 Kenez, 2001, 131.
124 Salys, 2009, 302. It is interesting to note, however, that Stalin apparently did not find the film's plot in any way contradictory with the new world despite of it still resembling the classical Cinderella story in many ways. And why would he have objected, when the old folk tale's optimistic story of a poor, oppressed Cinderella having her life changed completely by a wonder fitted the new Socialist Realism's doctrine of optimism and bright future perfectly.
125 Stalin's influence could also have more dramatic effects on the films' content. For instance, Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* had its ending changed likely due to Stalin insisting on having a happier ending than what Eisenstein had intended. See Christie, 1993b, 11.

demanding corrections or having it completely canceled. Such process takes time and explains why producing films was such a slow process in the 1930s when compared to the earlier decades.

Furthermore the lack of films in general in the 1930s was effected by the state taking tighter control of imported films as well as the domestic production. The censorship of foreign films started with soldiers, to whom it was forbidden to show these films beginning from the year 1928.[126] From there on the amount of the previously so popular foreign films decreased and decreased until the audience of the 1930s, according to Turovskaya, could "count those imported films on their fingers."[127] This all led to a rather unique situation where people still wanted to see films and loved them as entertainment, but because of the limited number of films available due to the aforementioned reasons, everyone who went to cinema was also bound to see all the available films.[128] Thus, while Salys remarks[129] that Aleksandrov's films were popular and people went to see *Happy Guys* even as many as 25 times, it is also a sign of there being a severe lack of films in the 1930s.

What then were the films still left after all the censorship and lack of materials? They were products of another major feature of the film industry in the 1930s: “films for the millions”. Films for the millions was a concept with clear roots in the 1920s and the Avant-Garde which had proven too difficult for the ordinary people to understand or become interested in. It is also an older concept than the Socialist Realism, though deeply interwoven with it. The idea of films for the millions was first adopted in the All-Union Party Conference on Cinema in 1928.[130] It was essentially a new direction to make the propaganda and educating the new man through film entertainment more effective than it had ever been in the 1920s. In addition to making different kind of films, this also meant changing the film industry from what it had been in the 1920s. The industry was to be expanded to reach the masses better, and the "politically unreliable" people who ran the old industry were to be replaced with people sympathizing with the Marxist ideology.[131] On the other hand, when the authorities wanted accessible films, easy enough for everyone to understand and enjoy, they also had to acknowledge that the people seemed to enjoy the foreign comedy, action, and adventure films, and thus take this into account when trying to effectively convey their political message to the masses.[132] Therefore, in a way, they wanted to go back to the pre-revolutionary

126 Reeves, 2004, 66.
127 Turovskaya, 1993, 49.
128 Spring, 1993, 2.
129 Salys, 2009, 68.
130 Miller, 2010, 16.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.

Russia's tradition where everyone regardless of social status would love the films and where it was a real, socially borderless mass entertainment in the scale it was available to the people in those days. Aleksandrov, with his sympathies for the government and skill for directing entertaining yet ideological musical comedies, was definitely needed in this new film culture, and it is therefore no wonder that he became one of the era's most prominent directors.

Kenez may be right in noting that "[...]the demand for films accessible to the millions was not accompanied by a license to make films that millions would actually want to see".[133] It seems unlikely that any film would simply be so good that people would go see it 25 times, even if Aleksandrov's films were more popular than average. Miller suggests that the "films for the millions" doctrine went wrong in becoming too political. Thus, instead of taking the viewers into a fairytale world (like Aleksandrov's films did and became popular), they were politically too demanding and therefore did not achieve popularity among the people.[134] However, while the name may be misleading, the impact of the new direction to the film industry and the films is without a question great, and a defining factor for determining the content of Aleksandrov's films from the Soviet point of view before delving into the folklore's perspective.

To summarize the most important observations for the thesis from the film industry's point of view, we can say three things. First, the cinema was an established form of art and entertainment in Russia before the revolution and was deeply influenced by the Western film industry. In trying to create a socialist cinema, the authorities tried to distance themselves from the foreign influences, but also had to take some steps back towards it. All this is very apparent in Aleksandrov's films as well. Second, the new film industry and cinema of the 1930s were "new" specifically when compared to their roots in the 1920s: the Soviet authorities in the 1930s knew what they did *not* want from the film industry. Third, The doctrine of Socialist Realism attacked the influences from the 1920s and in some ways moved back towards the world that resembled the pre-revolutionary Russia. To also find folkloric influences in it is therefore not impossible at all.

2.5 The Director in Soviet Union

"The creation of a new world requires the creation of a new man. The creation of a new culture requires a creator of a new type".[135] This quote from Heller is very relevant to this thesis because,

133 Kenez, 2001, 94.
134 Miller, 2010, 159.
135 Heller, 1988, 247.

having now discussed what the film industry was like, it is necessary to briefly cover who were the people creating it and what was their relationship to the state. While the Soviet artists were now working together with the state, it would be a misconception to say that the film industry would have suddenly become a monolith with only one voice and one face. It cannot be approached that way in this thesis, and in order to understand the films' content properly it is therefore necessary to explain, how the artists like Aleksandrov made their own voices and faces known within the framework set by the new industry described earlier.

While the 1930s in the Soviet Union saw tightening control of the state over many aspects of the society and it also extended its influence over the art, the artists themselves did not all turn into coerced slaves of the state. Instead they often co-operated with it. This started already in the late 1920s as the initiative for more state interfering in films did not come from the state itself, but directly from the directors such as Eisenstein in 1928.[136] The idea of artists being willing participants in the state's building of the new world is a recurring theme when they are being discussed in the literature. Kenez calls them active collaborators rather than passive victims.[137] Emerson, on the other hand, questions the Western misconception of being able to divide the people in the Soviet Union to dissidents and collaborators like that in the first place. This is because most of the Soviet citizens, including the artists, were simply ordinary people who attempted to live their lives, succeed, take care of themselves and their loved ones and be "normal" members of the society.[138]

Emerson's approach to the question of why artists would co-operate makes sense because it is based on a very humane explanation. While in retrospect most would likely agree that many bad things happened during Stalin's regime, there is no particular reason for why a single artist any more than any other individual person would have taken the risk and stood against it instead of trying to adapt and live a normal life within the society's framework. The possibility of being recognized as a brave individual in foreign countries or decades later in the history books is rarely a reason enough to act. Instead, the artists of the 1930s had plenty of concrete and very humane reasons to accept the state's interfering with their work. Some would seek to benefit themselves. While the state in the 1930s was whimsical in whom it favored and who fell out of favor, it was also a protective entity that would shield artists from their rivals.[139] Some might have had ideological reasons. Many of the well

136 Heller, 1988, 248 & Christie, 1993a, 149 – 151.
137 Kenez, 1993, 54.
138 Emerson, 2008, 192.
139 Heller, 1988, 248.

known directors like Dovzhenko and Eisenstein considered themselves good Bolsheviks despite of not being officially members of the party.[140] Some, like Aleksandrov who came from a working class background, simply utilized the opportunities they would not have had during the pre-revolutionary era, such as wider range of available education, and ended up supporting the system that way.[141] Others were pragmatic and understood that their high standards of living would be jeopardized if they rebelled against the state.[142] And finally there is the word "propaganda" itself which was not a negative word in the Soviet context. The idea of becoming a state's propagandist was not necessarily an ideological problem.

All these reasons explain why it was beneficial and logical for any given director to support the state, and therefore what their own relationship was to the ideological films they were creating for it. Aleksandrov likely did not need to code hidden messages and connotations into his films to avoid censorship, because he was rather a willing participant in the system instead of its silenced critic. The ideology in his films and the similarities to the Socialist Realism's demands are not only a superficial prop in his films. The question is how he chose to express them rather than if he chose.

This is not to say that the role of the artists did not change. To be a director in the 1930s was to be a worker employed the state. In Christie's words, when the state took over the film industry, it was a change "from art to state cultural industry".[143] Likewise, Christie continues, "The film-maker, like artists in other fields, was invited to become a 'Soviet artist' or to give up his claims to being a professional artist."[144] The herald of the new era was the Soyuzkino, founded in the year 1930 with a new leadership to replace its predecessor, the Sovkino, the former central piece of the industry.[145] It's second head, Boris Shumyatsky, played a large role in its functioning.[146] Mosfilm, the studio where Aleksandrov's films were produced, had since the early days of film industry's nationalization attempts in the 1920s been a state's film factory, and thus continued as a part of Soyuzkino.[147] Soyuzkino and Shumyatsky directly influenced what kind of films the directors were to produce. For instance, it was Shumyatsky who insisted on films with strong plots, easily recognizable

140 Kenez, 2001, 101.
141 Miller, 2010, 174.
142 Miller, 2010, 176.
143 Christie 1993a, 153.
144 Christie 1993a, 159.
145 Stites, 1992, 85 & Kenez, 2001, 95.
146 Kenez, 2001, 95. Kenez does not tell exactly when Shumyatsky took the position, but Salys (2009, 130 – 131) mentions him influencing Aleksandrov's film *Circus* (premiered in 1936) and Stites (1992, 85) implies he was vital in the formation of the new Soviet film, so it should be assumed that this happened soon after the founding of Soyuzkino.
147 Mosfilm, 2013.

protagonists and no artistic experimentation.[148] Shumyatsky's role should not be exaggerated here, however, since in the end he was but a normal official with very little power over the big picture of the state's film industry.[149] Nevertheless, the examples of his influence illustrate that when the independent artists became workers for the state, their work changed as well.

The state's most obvious influence on directors was telling them the subjects of their films.[150] This does not mean, however, that the directors would have been completely under the state's control in regards to subjects. They could also have their own side projects, though these projects could at any point be declared useless and thus never see the light of the day.[151] In addition to themes of the films, the state also set limitations to their plots through the doctrine of Socialist Realism. This was a phenomenon that touched more than just films. Kenez, discussing the socialist realist films, refers to Clark's concept of Socialist Realism's "master plot" in the Soviet novels with the following description:

> A Socialist Realist novel is always a *Bildungsroman*: that is, it is about the acquisition of consciousness. In the process of fulfilling a task, the hero or heroine, under the tutelage of a Party worker, acquires an increased understanding of self, the surrounding world, the task of building Communism, the class struggle, the need for vigilance etc.[152]

While this plot description fits some of Aleksandrov's films, it is rather doubtful if it can be applied to the era's films as directly as Kenez does. Dovzhenko's well known film *Aerograd* (1935), for example, has many Socialist Realism's themes, but a single, named protagonist acquiring consciousness is not nearly as strongly present as Kenez implies it should be. Aleksandr Faintsimmer's *Lieutenant Kizhe* (1934) is a comedy making fun of pre-revolutionary Russia with no references to such themes. These are early examples to which the Socialist Realism may not have effected as strongly, but these themes are not strongly present in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) either. In short, the Soviet films of the era are far more multifaceted than Kenez implies. Nevertheless he is correct in saying that the Socialist Realism did put certain restrictions to the directors and therefore definite character archetypes can also be identified in the Soviet films.[153] Similar archetypes for Soviet characters in literature are presented in Emerson's account, showing

148 Stites, 1992, 85.
149 Kenez, 2001, 115.
150 Dovzhenko, for example, wanted to make a film about arctic explorer Amundsen in 1930, but instead he was told that his next film should show industrialization in Ukraine. Kenez, 2001, 103.
151 Kozlov, 1993, 112.
152 Kenez, 1993, 56.
153 Kenez (2001, 144) identifies three Soviet character archetypes, which will be further applied to Aleksandrov's films during the source analysis.

that different arts were overlapping in adhering to the new doctrine.[154]

Partly because of being limited in their ability to choose which kind of plots and which kind of characters they could use, the directors' careers were unpredictable in the state's service. During Stalin's era anything could and was even expected to become part of the politics.[155] Thus it is to be expected that when the director's politics, unintentional or not, did not please the authorities, there were consequences. In the year 1930 a well known actor, Nikolai Okhlopkov, had his career as a director halted after his third film was banned.[156] Likewise Dovzhenko, already a well known director by then, received very hostile critique for his film *Earth* and simultaneously was regarded as unreliable and a counter-revolutionary.[157] The situation was just as difficult for artists who may have intentionally wanted to support the state, because the party's official line changed often and being sure of what was considered pure or impure at any given moment was difficult.[158] The examples illustrate how a director's social standing were linked with his art and they can be applied to Aleksandrov's films by reminding that although he was a popular director and a supporter of the state, he was not invulnerable and could not do anything he wanted. The content of Aleksandrov's films from the Soviet point of view do not reflect only his or the state's ideals. Instead they are a result of the otherwise willingly co-operating director still balancing between his artistic creativity and avoiding a mistake that could ruin his career.

This was the situation where Aleksandrov's career as a director truly began in the Soviet film industry, and the situation to which his films arrived to spread their optimism and visions of the bright future. While Aleksandrov had started working in the film industry in the 1920s[159] he did not direct his first own film until early 1930s. In that way he represented a new generation of directors. These directors knew the Avant-Gardist art from the 1920s, but started their own careers as creative artists only after experimentation was already going out of fashion in favor of the quickly approaching Socialist Realism.

Aleksandrov's films were something new for the audiences in the sense that they started a new genre: the Soviet musical, with its first example being *Happy Guys*.[160] While the musical genre's

154 Emerson, 2008, 202.
155 Emerson, 2008, 192 & 200.
156 Christie, 1993a, 158.
157 Kenez, 2001, 103.
158 Emerson, 2008, 194.
159 See Salys, 2009, 7 and Holmgren, 2007, 7.
160 Salys, 2009, 3.

golden age is defined by Altman to have been in the years 1929 and 1930, whereas by the 1932 it was already going out of fashion, Aleksandrov still managed to bring it to the Soviet Union and make it popular among the audiences.[161] But the popularity of the Soviet musical comedies were not only due to Aleksandrov being a talented filmmaker. One of the reasons was that while the genre was new, the content was still to some extent familiar to the audiences. Aleksandrov had traveled to Hollywood, visited the Disney studios, become friends with Charles Chaplin and recorded plots and gags of the American films into a notebook.[162] Thus his films also borrowed aspects from their American counterparts and in this way he gave the audiences back what had been essentially denied from them first by the Avant-Gardist experimentation and then banning of the foreign films. His films returned back to the roots of Russia's film industry, but also mixed in the new era's ideals and the Socialist Realism to create a new kind of comedy.

As can be surmised from the paragraphs above, directing such mix was risky. On the one hand, Stalin had personally told Aleksandrov that the country needed comedies, and Shumyatsky had demanded more happy, optimistic films.[163] On the other hand, the demands set by the ideology were high and Aleksandrov was still at this point a fledgling director instead of an established artist. Thus he found himself in a paradoxical situation. On one side, there were the audiences to please and he knew what they wanted. Furthermore, the Soviet authorities knew it as well, as is evident from Stalin's and Shumyatsky's demand for optimistic comedies. On the other side there was the ideology, and to please the ideology may have often also meant displeasing the audiences. In the end Aleksandrov's solution to the problem seems to have worked well, seeing that his films were popular, yet his career as a director was not cut short and his films were not canceled. Finding the balance was again a central part of his work and is reflected to the films' content.

Another problem Aleksandrov faced was that the comedy itself was a problematic genre for the Soviet authorities. Firstly, in society where everything could become part of politics, anything could also be seen as subversive mocking of the society and the authorities.[164] And second, the new society was supposed to be perfect: how to make depicting it fun then?[165] The latter problem was solved by defining the role of comedy as advancing the optimistic, pro-government message of the

161 Altman, 2002, 48.
162 Salys, 2009, 4. According to Gillespie (2010, 115), Aleksandrov was not the first to make films influenced by Hollywood, but such influences were seen already in Lev Kuleshov's film *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924). Aleksandrov is still definitely among the more well known authors to do so.
163 Holmgren, 2007, 8 – 9.
164 Gillespie, 2010, 115.
165 Salys, 2009, 34.

happier life.[166] Thus it is not surprising that Aleksandrov, for example, loved to show the latest achievements of the Soviet state in his films.[167] Aleksandrov also solved this problem in *Circus* by criticizing the West. In short, while a typical Western films offered utopian solutions to real, domestic problems, Aleksandrov ignored the real, domestic problems of the Soviet Union and rather pointed out the problems in the Western societies, after which he offered the Soviet Union as the solution to those problems.[168] Continuing this line of thought a bit further, it could even be argued that Aleksandrov took the concept of "American dream", which he no doubt knew from his time in Hollywood, and turned it into the "Soviet dream". The Soviet dream in Aleksandrov's films retained some parts of its model, but was also to be a new and better dream, much like the society it depicted was to be new and better than the old, capitalistic one.

To summarize the most important observations for the thesis from the directors' point of view, we can say three things. First, we have established that Aleksandrov was not a free artist, but he collaborated with the state willingly. Therefore his films can be expected to support the state and not contain anti-government connotations or subtle criticism. Second, the Socialist Realism did not necessarily dictate every single detail in the films, but influenced large concepts such as the characters and the plots. The content of the films is therefore a mix of the artists' voices and the state's demands. Third, Aleksandrov was commissioned by the state to direct his comedies and may have enjoyed some liberties therefore, but he was still not invulnerable to the perils of being an artist in the Soviet Union and had to find a balance in his films. The influence of the latter is likely reflected more strongly into his films than the influence of the former.

Having so far covered the film industry, the mainstream art and the role of the director, it seems that there would be good grounds for starting to interpret Aleksandrov's films, and as was argued in the introduction, these are the grounds on which most of the studies approach the Soviet films of the era. These foundations cannot be ignored, but one less explored aspect of the Soviet films is still to be discussed. What then about the old, pre-revolutionary folk tales and their role in the new society? What happened to them and what kind of tales were they in the first place?

166 Gillespie, 2010, 115.
167 Salys, 2009, 8.
168 Holmgren, 2007, 21 – 22.

3. The Folklore Perspective

Despite of the revolution and the ideological goals, the new Soviet society in the 1930s resembled in many ways the pre-revolutionary Russia and continued even some medieval traditions in regards to cities and countryside. If the pre-revolutionary society was at least partly alive in the new world, intentionally or not, what happened to the pre-revolutionary culture and the folk tales in specific? The final chapter before the source analysis discusses that, as well as outlining the tales told before revolution in the Russian countryside. This opens the thesis' second perspective in general, and especially through the character archetypes of the folklore to which the characters of Aleksandrov's films will later be compared.

3.1 The Soviet Folk Culture

The brief answer to the question of the pre-revolutionary culture's fate is that it did not simply die or wither away. The authorities' stance towards it varied, however, so its appearance in the cinema is still open for studying. In some regards there were attempts to destroy it. Example of such would be the campaign against religion, very prevalent to the Soviet regime's attempt to change the countryside and its people in the 1930s. In some cases it was tolerated or at the very least could not be destroyed. Stites notes that there were two parallel cultures living together: the official "mass culture" (which has been the focus of the earlier chapter) and the folk culture.[169] And finally, in some other cases the folk culture was even encouraged. When the guidelines of the Socialist Realism were being defined in the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, the most prominent herald of the new artistic doctrine, Maxim Gorky, demanded that the art should be easily approachable for the people (thus further outlining also the "films for the millions" principle in cinema), and he believed that this would be best achieved by having the art utilize the traditions of the people.[170] Gorky also insisted that the best archetypes for heroes had been created already in the folk tales.[171] Therefore, although Gorky perhaps could not make such decisions alone, it can be said that in narrative art like literature and cinema especially the pre-revolutionary culture was not dead.

Despite of the above, the thesis cannot simply conclude by saying that Gorky endorsed folklore, so folklore in the art existed and was utilized intentionally. This is not because Gorky would not be an influential authority on this subject, but because the folklore itself was a subject for change in the

169 Stites, 1992, 65.
170 Emerson, 2008, 200.
171 Oinas, 1975, 158.

Soviet era. Gorky must have been aware of that when making his statement. He did not mean that just any ancient traditions would suffice for building socialism, and this had also been the case in the earlier decade. While the folklorists had been active in collecting the folklore in the 1920s, there had also been attacks against them, with the attackers claiming that the folklore represented the old society and especially its ruling class and was thus unsuitable for the new society.[172] There were also attempts to fabricate new folklore between the years 1924 and 1930, to claim folk background for suddenly appearing narrative texts commemorating Lenin and the civil war.[173]

In the 1930s the folklore attained a more official and higher social status, which was evident already from the fact that for the first time it became an independent academic discipline instead of being subjected to literature or ethnography.[174] However, this sudden change also came with the condition that the folklore was now instead subjected to the ideology. When collecting folklore, the collectors were also to edit it by leaving out the unsuitable parts, such as "bourgeois romances".[175] Thus was born a new "Soviet folklore" which, according to Oinas, had little to do with the actual folklore.[176] Being now a tool for political purposes like the other arts, it was no secret either that the leading folklorists in the Soviet Union were wanting to establish dominance over the peasant culture.[177] Thus the folklorists were in a way telling the peasants what kind of peasant culture they should represent instead of making observations on the culture the peasants represented. The folklore was also getting modernized in accordance to the Soviet ideals. Folk tales, for example, lost the wooden eagle with which the hero used to fly, and instead put him into an aeroplane and had him use more Soviet words like "comrade" in his speech.[178]

In theory the discussion of folklore could be left at that. It would be tempting to claim that what ever folk elements can be found in Aleksandrov's films are only reflections of the new Soviet folklore, and Aleksandrov must have used them intentionally. This would be a lacking approach, however, because it would presume that the Soviet authorities would have first of all set such high aim as to destroy the rest of the old folklore, pursued it in a determined way and, finally, succeeded in it. At the very least the latter part becomes problematic. It could for instance be argued that despite of the authorities' definitely determined and consistent efforts to suppress the religion,

172 Oinas, 1975, 157.
173 Panchenko, 2012, 433.
174 Panchenko, 2012, 430.
175 Oinas, 1975, 158 – 160.
176 Oinas, 1973, 48.
177 Panchenko, 2012, 434.
178 Sokolov, 2012, 663.

people did not abandon it completely during the Soviet era. The number of people identifying themselves as Orthodox Christians has been on steady rise after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[179] This indicates that many of them may simply be now confessing their faith more openly instead of suddenly converting to Christianity. The same could be assumed of any aspect of culture that fell out of favor. There is no such absolute power which could outright erase hundreds of years of tradition, especially within this thesis' time frame. Therefore it can be assumed that the elements of folk culture that can be seen in Aleksandrov's films are not only those officially sanctioned. To further explore this assumption in the source analysis it is therefore necessary to discuss the pre-revolutionary Russia's folklore and folk tales in specific before delving deeper into the Soviet sources.

3.2 The Pre-Revolutionary Culture

In many ways the Russian folklore is a mix of Slavic paganism and Christianity. When the new religion started spreading from the cities into the countryside, it met stubborn but passive resistance.[180] As often happens, it did not replace the old tradition but instead merged with it, creating a hybrid that could not be rooted out despite of attempts that continued until the 19th century.[181] Pagan faith and its close relation to the concrete nature around its followers can be seen in the folk tales too. For instance, a sign of an archaic tale, dating back to that era, is to have a villain who somehow controls the power of nature, such as wind or water.[182] Despite of such mixing of two religious traditions, the Orthodox Christianity is still an important and visible factor in the pre-revolutionary Russian folklore. One of its influences are the saints. They, and even Jesus himself, are recurring characters in Russian tales and can act as characters in a story instead of being its sole, sacred protagonists.[183] Such role is not reserved only to the religious characters, but to actual historical people as well. A common recurring character in folklore is Ivan the Terrible who, contrary to his historical reputation, is not terrible at all, but instead a friend of the peasants. The villain of these stories is usually an envious or otherwise evil *boyar*, a member of the Russian feudal aristocracy, whereas the Tsar himself is good.[184]

The saints, however, could also be as important protagonists as they are in the Western hagiography

179 Statistics from Levada Tsentr, 2011. See list of electronic sources.
180 Haney, 1999, 46.
181 Emerson, 2008, 61 – 62.
182 Haney, 1999, 93 & Emerson, 2008, 67.
183 Haney, 1999, 9.
184 Sokolov, 2012, 383.

and act as a perfect role model for the audiences.[185] In regards to the Soviet Union, Emerson notes that the model revolutionary hero of the Bolsheviks and the old Orthodox saint are not very different from each other.[186] It is also interesting to note that the stories about saints were generally thought to be true still even in the 19th and 20th century, and refer to the actual "times" when the saints walked in Russia.[187] The leap to Soviet propaganda creating new, proletarian saints from such foundation was not therefore a long one to make, and seeing such influences in the films of the 1930s is also entirely possible as observed later in Aleksandrov's films.

Stalin's fortress mentality was also something that had its equivalent in Russia's Orthodox past. Stalin was afraid of hostile countries surrounding the Soviet Union, the only socialist state in the world, and aimed to strengthen the country in order to prepare for the inevitable war. The Orthodox Russians, on the other hand, had seen themselves as surrounded by religious enemies: to the West were heretics (Catholics), and to the East and South pagans and heathens.[188] Being surrounded this way and being subjected to attacks from many directions during its history is reflected in the culture of Russia. Especially the vastness of the country became an important part of the mentality, as it not only meant long borders to guard, but also lots of space to fight in.[189] In folk culture this mentality is reflected especially to the *bogatyr*, a legendary knight whose most important role is to act as a defender of Russia and to guard her borders.[190]

The folk tales also reflect the peasant's idea of the world. One such reflection is the depiction of the nature's basic building blocks. The four classical elements, fire, air, earth, and water, are important, and of these the former two are considered masculine and mystical, whereas the latter two are feminine and physical.[191] Thus the river Volga, for example, is "dear mother" in a well known folk song about Stenka Razin.[192] In the middle of this world was home, the center of the peasant's cosmos.[193] It is so important that even the otherworldly paradise in a peasant tale is often simply a clean room with a comfortable bed in it.[194]

185 Emerson, 36.
186 Ibid.
187 Haney, 1999, 5.
188 Emerson, 2008, 29.
189 Emerson, 2008, 24.
190 Emerson, 2008, 72. Since the *bogatyr* is a character typical to the *byliny* (epic poems) instead of folk tales, they shall not be discussed or studied in-depth in this thesis.
191 Emerson, 2008, 62.
192 *Iz-za ostrova na strezhen'*, Russian folk song. See list of electronic sources.
193 Ibid.
194Sokolov, 2012, 469.

Despite of Russia being a vast country with not only one tradition, the literature on folk culture finds three basic categories for the folk tales, which will be used to discuss them in this thesis too. These are the animal tales, tales of everyday life, and the wonder tales.[195] Of these the wonder tales are of special interest for this thesis because, despite of aspects of different story types overlapping and being found in films, Aleksandrov's films most closely resemble them. Therefore they shall be discussed next.

3.3 The Wonder tales

In essence, a wonder tale is simply what the name suggests, and very familiar in other cultures than Russian as well: a wondrous tale, often (but not always) an adventure in which the hero leaves his home for a quest[196], saves the damsel in distress from a dragon[197] and then inherits the kingdom[198]. Despite of there being many different tales, Propp suggests that the typical wonder tale can be summarized with the following formula: "a misfortune occurs; the hero is asked to help; he sets off; on the way he meets someone who puts him to the test and rewards him with a magic tool; with its help he finds the sought-for object; the hero returns and is rewarded".[199]

Propp's model is interesting, because it suggests that a Russian wonder tale starts from unhappiness and follows a linear progression into happiness. This fits well with the Russian tradition of choosing the seemingly worst character (such as the poorest of all peasants) as its protagonist, instead of the best and the most virtuous.[200] Sinyavsky has also noted that these people tend to start from poor conditions, but end up much better at the end of the tale.[201] Western story tradition, on the other hand, follows a more cyclic progression. A Western heroic tale starts from happiness, which is then threatened by evil, but the hero vanquishes the evil and the happiness returns.[202] This tradition has carried over to the basic model of a Hollywood movie narrative, which goes from equilibrium to equilibrium: in the beginning there is harmony, which is then threatened by something, but in the

195 Emerson, 2008, 67. Haney (1999, 8) claims there are at least ten recognized types of folk tales, but his account, as well as Sokolov's, focuses on these three despite of this.
196 Haney, 1999, 93.
197 Haney, 1999, 101 & Sokolov, 2012, 420.
198 Haney, 1999, 13.
199 Propp, 1984, 74 – 75.
200 Sinyavsky, 2001, 12.
201 Sinyavsky, 2001, 13.
202 Hänninen, 2010, 169. It should be noted that this is specific to the genre of heroic stories, but the other genres Hänninen describes (comedy, tragedy and satire) do not resemble a Russian wonder tale like this genre seems to, and thus the comparison between the two plot types is valid.

end the beginning's stable status quo returns.[203] While the Western and Eastern story traditions also have similarities[204], here seems to be a fundamental difference between them.

While Propp's model is rather simplistic as far as describing a plot goes, it still does make some important observations on the wonder tales. The first one is the test. Characteristic motifs for a wonder tales, in addition to being literally wondrous (that is, including a somehow supernatural element), is that they revolve around the hero being tested and changing, or perhaps rather "evolving". The change can be physical, mental or spiritual, but essentially it is about becoming an adult, growing from a boy to being a man.[205] The climax of such tale is not its end, but in the middle, the part where the protagonists changes into being a hero.[206] As has been noted before, the hero undergoing a major change is also a part of the socialist realist art and the hero becoming more "conscious" is a major theme in the Soviet films and literature. When the hero of the traditional wonder tale went on adventure to come back as a man, the socialist hero adventures to end up as a better socialist. Thus there is already the second major link to the pre-revolutionary culture.

The causes of this change, on the other hand, are different tests during the course of the story and also a magic tool gained from passing them successfully by adhering to certain conventions.[207] These magic tools are an integral part of the wonder tale, and in a way this tradition was also reflected to the new society in the Soviet Union. Fitzpatrick notes that a typical magic object in the Russian tradition is a magic tablecloth which makes food and drink appear out of thin air. She then observes that the often repeated promise of socialism bringing prosperity in the future continued this same tradition in the Soviet Union.[208] In addition to these items of magical abundance, the Russian tales know also the more "ordinary" magic tools such as the flying carpet or a piece of cloth that makes its wearer invisible, but also less ordinary, such as eggs from which whole kingdoms come out or combs that turn into forest to shield the heroes.[209]

A typical feature for a Russian wonder tale, and a folk tale universally, is that they do not specify where and when they take place, and this is made clear in the very beginning of the tale.[210] The

203 Strinati, 2000, 29 – 30.
204 For example, the Western tradition also knows the type of tale very popular in Russia, described further below, where the hero goes on a journey in order to be tested and in the end become wiser. Hänninen, 2010, 170.
205 Haney, 1999, 9.
206 Haney, 1999, 94.
207 Haney, 1999, 92 – 93.
208 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 89.
209 Sokolov, 2012, 426.
210 Haney, 1999, 20. Compare to the English beginning "once upon a time", German "es war einmal", or Finnish "olipa kerran".

wonder tales take place in "another kingdom", which is essentially an utopian dreamland where the hungry and poor audiences are shown visions of rivers of milk and the humble protagonists becoming kings in the end.[211] This is not much different from the Socialist Realist art promising a brighter future that would soon become reality, but an utopian art itself is not in any way an extraordinary or specifically Soviet phenomenon. This continuum only shows that people have a tendency to dream of something better. It is a framework in which the stories happen, and the actors in this framework are therefore able to give more insight to their nature. Therefore they will be addressed next before being introduced to the Soviet sources and studied in this context.

3.4 The Heroes and Villains of a Wonder Tale

According to Sokolov, there are five types of characters in a tale. These are the hero, the hero's helper, the person saved by the hero, the enemy and the enemy's helper.[212] Propp, on the other hand, proposes a slightly different model. He adds two special types, a dispatcher and a false hero, whereas the helper becomes just helper instead of being specified further; a new character in this model is also the donor who gives the magic tool to the hero.[213] Of these types of characters to this thesis the most relevant are the heroes and the enemies, and therefore a closer look shall be taken at them.

While common features of the wonder tales' heroes have been researched and are known, one of them is that in the tales not much is known about the hero or his features. This is because the folk tales' heroes are not a real individuals.[214] Whereas some legendary heroes of the epic poems, and even legendary villains of the folk tales such as Baba-Yaga and Koschei the Deathless, are well developed and established characters who appear in many tales, a folk tale's hero is just a rather generic hero. Sokolov explains that this is because the archetype characters exist for established functions in the folk tale's narrative genre, and thus the character's role and function are more important than the character itself.[215] Sometimes the heroes do not even have names, but may simply be "two brothers", representing something in the story but not really acting as persons.[216] This feature is not exclusive to Russia. The three little pigs and the big bad wolf do not have names either. However, what is more interesting to note is that instead of the name being an obvious

211 Sinyavsky, 2001, 9.
212 Sokolov, 2012, 422.
213 Haney, 1999, 13.
214 Haney, 1999, 6.
215 Sokolov, 2012, 427.
216 Morozova, 1977, 231 – 232.

feature of a character, in a Russian tale it can instead serve to give some special meaning to the character.[217] Thus, for example, the character helping the hero gets his or her purpose in the story told right from the first meeting by being called "Pull-Down-The-Wall".[218]

When the typical hero has a name, he is called Ivan, with other popular names being Fyodor and Vasily.[219] Ivan also has an additional, social status name to distinguish him from the other Ivans. He is often the son of a Tsar, whereas the heroes of peasant or merchant origin, while they exist, are not as common in the wonder tales.[220] In addition, Ivan can also be Ivan the Soldier, Ivan the Farmhand, Ivan the Fool, Ivan the Brave or Ivan the Unlucky, for instance.[221] In addition to this, the audience may get to know some special feature or skill Ivan has.[222] With little deduction it can also be found out that Ivan's family life is not very happy, since most stories start by describing a somehow dysfunctional family unit, or at the very least the family's nature becomes apparent during the course of the story, and this justifies the need for a change, which on the other hand gives a motive for the hero.[223] But this is about as much as can be said about Ivan. Despite of these recurring story telling motifs, Ivan is essentially a typical everyman with whom the audiences can identify.[224] Even when being a son of a noble the difference is superficial at the best, since the nobles of the peasant tales tended to be essentially peasants in nature and habits, with only different names and titles.[225]

Ivan is also a typical hero because he is a man. Female protagonists are far more rare, and often also less personalized, which is evident from there being much less canonical names for the females in the folk tales than for males.[226] Whereas Ivan gives the audiences an exciting and wondrous adventure, a typical female protagonist instead represents the virtues upheld in the tale (and, in the end, the peasants' world view), such as beauty and wisdom.[227] Therefore it is also easy to understand why, if she leaves home to become an adventurer, it is usually explained to be because she is forced to leave, unlike a male protagonist, who leaves and becomes a hero voluntarily.[228] A typical female character is a Cinderella-like simple, modest and sensitive character, but there are also tales

217 Morozova, 1977, 231.
218 Sokolov, 2012, 424.
219 Morozova, 1977, 236.
220 Sokolov, 2012, 423. However, this does not mean that heroes from poorer social classes would not also exist, since it has already been noted that the poorest of all peasants makes for a great tale protagonist in the Russian tradition.
221 Morozova, 1977, 236.
222 Haney, 1999, 93 & Sokolov, 2012, 423.
223 Haney, 1999, 96.
224 Haney, 1999, 7.
225 Sokolov, 2012, 466.
226 Morozova, 1977, 233.
227 Sokolov, 2012, 423.
228 Haney, 1999, 97.

depicting a completely opposite type of a strong warrior princess character.[229] Nevertheless, Sokolov states that the most important function of a female protagonist is still to be saved by the male hero.[230] Instead of wonder tales, the female protagonists feature much more prominently in tales focused around the family disputes, in which the center of the events is the home and the family, and the typical villain is not a wondrous being, such as a dragon, but someone from the protagonist's family.[231]

Ivan's personality and acting in the story depend on what kind of Ivan he is precisely. Emerson has lined out certain different archetype characters which can be applied also to the folk tales. One of them is the aforementioned Ivan the Fool. According to Sinyavsky, the fool is not only the most popular, but also the most colorful folk tale character.[232] The fool is a popular character due to Russian traditional attitude towards strangeness of such people as village idiots having been generally positive.[233] Such character, who does everything wrong and backwards, also provided comic relief into the lives of practical-minded peasants.[234] Therefore, as being a fool is in the nature of the character and it does not necessarily exclude other backgrounds, Ivan can be the son of the Tsar, and still also a fool. Indeed, one of the major recurring motifs of a folk tale is having a fool in the end win and outsmart people who underestimated him, so there is no reason for why this fool could not be of noble birth too.[235] The fool is so common character in the folk tales that even in the Russian Cinderella stories the Prince Charming -character resembles far more a lucky fool instead of being the handsome and heroic character he is in the Western tradition.[236]

Some of the traditional villain types, on the other hand, have been mentioned earlier in this subchapter. One of them is the archaic, wondrous villain who controls some aspect of the nature. From the Western point of view there is also the more traditional serpent or a dragon. Perhaps a more distinctively Russian, on the other hand, is the evil *boyar*, as opposed to the good Tsar. His sins, being corrupted by power and greedy, also have religious origins. Whereas in the West it was more common to think being prosperous as a sign of God's favor, in the Eastern Orthodoxy excessive wealth was thought to lead into spiritual decadence. From this tradition it did not take much effort for the Soviet authorities to start persecuting the wealthy "bourgeois class", and later

229 Sokolov, 2012, 424.
230 Sokolov, 2012, 423.
231 Haney, 1999, 94.
232 Sinyavsky, 2001, 17.
233 Givens, 2000, 58.
234 Sinyavsky, 2001, 17.
235 Sokolov, 2012, 423.
236 Emerson, 2008, 71.

the kulaks, the common enemy of the 1930s.[237]

Being tied with religion, the Russian tradition also knows the concept of devils, but its attitude towards these otherworldly villains seem to be rather casual, as it was towards the saints as well. It is not unheard of for the hero of the story, for instance, to descend to Hell, meet the Devil and then bargain with him.[238] The other world itself can be a very concrete place too, seeing that the hero may descend there literally by using a rope.[239] Thus it can again be seen that while the Orthodox Christianity gave the Russian folk culture many influences and is reflected into the tales as well, the folk culture is in essence a mix between the old and the new views, of pagan and Christian, of mundane and spiritual.

To summarize the most important observations for the thesis in this chapter, we can say three things. First, the folk culture was not outright dead in the new society: it was even encouraged in some cases, but the difference between the endorsed folklore and the folklore outside it still leave it open for the question of whether only the officially sanctioned folklore was to be seen in the films. Second, the folk culture was influenced by religion. Despite of it being banned in the 1930s, this influence cannot be ignored in this thesis' scope. Third, several aspects of the pre-revolutionary folk culture have rather striking counterparts in the Soviet culture. This creates a good foundation for expanding the question of the relationship between the films' heroes and villains with the folklore's characters.

This subchapter also concludes the chapters on general background necessary for the source analysis. Before moving on to explore the films, a short summary of the conclusions is in order. In addition to outlining the thesis' three most important concepts – the concept of "new man" and his society, the concept of Soviet film and art, and the concept of folk tale – these chapters have also discussed three major phenomena that might be found to be influencing Aleksandrov's films. These are:

1. The socialist art: the demands set to the films by the Socialist Realism.

2. The background of Aleksandrov's films: he studied in Hollywood and brought the musical comedy to the Soviet Union from there.

237 Emerson, 2008, 49 – 50.
238 Haney, 1999, 9.
239 Haney, 1999, 101.

3. The folk culture discussed in this chapter.

Salys has studied and discussed second influence in depth, and doing the same in this thesis is therefore unnecessary. The first influence, on the other hand, cannot be ignored because it creates the historical context for the film analysis, but it is again a perspective that has been widely examined in the past. Despite of not being examined in depth in this thesis, it is not to say that either of them is irrelevant for the following source analysis. While the focus of this thesis is on the third influence, it does not aim to prove that every single aspect of Aleksandrov's films is inspired by the folk culture. When necessary, the first two influences will also be considered as possible alternatives for the findings where these three influences seem to be overlapping.

4. *Happy Guys*

The filming of Aleksandrov's first musical comedy, *Happy Guys*, started in June 1933 and the film was premiered approximately one and a half years later, in December 1934.[240] While the film was the first of its kind, it was no small scale or purely experimental project. Many people who took part in its production were already experienced and respected in their own fields.[241] Some of these people included the musician Leonid Utyosov, who played the protagonist Kostya Potekhin, and the composer Isaac Dunayevsky, who composed the music for Aleksandrov's future films as well. The somewhat experimental nature of the *Happy Guys* can be seen especially in the criticism it received after the premier. The film was generally well received, but it was criticized especially for its lack of ideology and for having too many American influences.[242] Although Aleksandrov utilized the Hollywood influences later as well, the weakly present ideology is what separates his first film from the ones filmed later.

The message of *Happy Guys* is nevertheless at least as cheerful and optimistic as that of his later films. This kind of message was needed in the society of that time, since the life in reality was not always as cheerful as in the films. Collectivization campaign had started changing the countryside and the lives of millions of people only few years earlier. In the years 1932 and 1933 especially the Southern parts of the Soviet Union had been struck by a great famine which caused shortages to continue also the year 1934.[243] The quickly growing cities could not provide housing and

240 Salys, 2009, 41 & 67.
241 Salys, 2009, 25.
242 Salys, 2009, 35 & 65.
243 Ward, 1993, 48.

commodities to all the new people moving in them.[244] Due to the first five year plan not achieving its goals properly, the goals of the second one had to be lowered.[245] None of this is to point out only the poor qualities of the Soviet society in the era, but to show through some of the era's major problems why Aleksandrov's optimistic comedies were needed and why they had such distinct style in them. The people needed entertainment to escape the difficulties of the reality and the authorities needed it to legitimize themselves. Aleksandrov provided answer to both of these with his directing style and continued to do so in his latter films as well.

4.1 The Film as a Story

The film tells the story of Kostya Potekhin, a happy go lucky shepherd from the Soviet countryside near a place where affluent people also come to spend their holidays. One day, after he has led his herd through the village and practiced playing violin with his teacher Karl, Kostya goes swimming. Unknown to him, a famous Italian conductor Costa Fraschini has also gone swimming at the same time nearby. When Kostya comes back ashore he meets Yelena, the daughter of a rich family and a singer, who admires Fraschini and is looking for him at the beach. She mistakes Kostya for Fraschini and the two get acquainted. Due to misunderstandings from both of them, Yelena finally invites Kostya to visit her later at the *Black Swan* -resort for a feast and introduction to her mother. Kostya falls in love with Yelena. Later he arrives to her place and also brings all his cattle with him but leaves them outside to wait for him. However, the animals manage to follow him inside and ruin Yelena's party. Kostya is driven out. Soon he learns from Yelena's maid, Anyuta, that Yelena is leaving the countryside resort and traveling to Moscow. Anyuta also hints having feelings for Kostya, but Kostya turns her down and decides to follow his romantic interest to the capital.

Arriving to Moscow, Kostya ends up in a theater where Fraschini is to have a concert soon. Due to several lucky coincidences, he gets mistaken for Fraschini again while also causing a minor chaos in the theater and being chased around the building by its staff. Kostya accidentally becomes Fraschini's orchestra's unwitting conductor for a short time, until he is forced to flee the theater's staff again. He is saved by a jazz band that wants him to become their new leader. Kostya accepts. While Kostya and his band rehearse to play in Bolshoi Theater, Yelena is doing the same at her house. However, she ends up at odds with Anyuta when realizing that her maid sings better than she does. Anyuta is seen leaving Yelena's house and by coincidence meets Kostya and his band, who are

244 Ward, 1993, 81.
245 Lewin, 2005, 49.

on their way to the Bolshoi Theater. They take her with them, but the angry cart driver who gave the band a ride does not let her in the theater with them because Kostya forgot to pay him.

Kostya's band starts their concert, but their instruments are too wet and cannot make any sounds. Kostya encourages his band to play with only their lips, and the band manages to have a successful show by essentially becoming clowns. The driver interrupts them with Anyuta, again demanding payment, but is dismissed by Kostya. Anyuta (now drunk from the alcohol the driver forced her to drink in order to stay warm) starts instinctively singing with the band, not knowing where she is. When she realizes the truth and is about to run away in shame, Kostya encourages her to continue singing. Anyuta transforms from a simple maid into a respectable singer, and with her help the concert becomes a great success. In the end Kostya understands that he loves Anyuta. The film ends with the whole Bolshoi Theater singing along with Kostya, Anyuta and the band, as the camera slowly pans away from them.

Before examining the characters, it is worth noticing that *Happy Guys* does not continue folkloric traditions only through them, but has other elements of the past in it as well. While the film is not very ideological when compared to the rest of the quartet, it is still a rather typical Socialist Realism film in showing not how things are, but how they should be. For example, the collectivization campaign in the film's recent past could not in the light of historical knowledge be called popular among its targets, or even very successful despite of the goal of collective agriculture being finally achieved. Yet Kostya's story paints a very different picture of the countryside: one of happiness, sunshine and songs. There are similar examples in Aleksandrov's other films. Due to them it could therefore be argued that, even though the films nominally take place in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, they still depict the folk tale-like utopian “another kingdom”. Only this was the utopia that was to be reality soon, whereas the peasant storytellers made no such claims to their audiences even implicitly like Aleksandrov does. Here the new art doctrine and the old tradition are overlapping.

The previous overlapping may seem minor because, as noted before, just having the art to reflect utopian ideals is not an especially extraordinary feature, but rather an universal phenomenon. But Aleksandrov also uses other, more strongly folkloric aspects in the film. One of them are the symbolic animals. They are first utilized in the beginning of the film, in the scene[246] where Kostya gathers his herd together in a military fashion. He has named his animals like human beings: he has English girls, Swiss girls, Dutch girls, a bureaucrat, a secretary and a professor, for example. Each

246 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:07:05 – 00:08:37.

of these animals is shown after he calls their name. It likely is not a coincidence that the bureaucrat is a goat. English girls, on the other hand, are a group of pigs. While the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in the 1934, becoming somewhat closer with the Western nations, one should bear in mind, that the film only premiered in that year. Not much earlier Britain had been among the Soviet Union's greatest perceived enemies, and the relations between the countries were cold.[247] Both the film and Aleksandrov's own perception may still reflect that time of the international politics in this subtle connotation. While it is true that the domesticated animals are more uncommon in the folkloric animal tales than those of the forest, certain animals still carry certain connotations.[248] These connotations are used here.

4.2 Kostya Potekhin: The Classic Fool

Considering that *Happy Guys* is one of Aleksandrov's earliest films, it is rather surprising to see its protagonist resembling more a classical folk tale fool than a revolutionary hero of socialism or a Hollywood character. At first a more apparent assumption would be that Aleksandrov, despite of being a creative artist, would have still played it safe and taken his examples for his first musical comedy from the more prevalent conventions. And while Aleksandrov's first protagonist, the shepherd Kostya Potekhin[249], certainly does have features from these conventions too, his resemblance of the classical folk tale fool is much more strongly present throughout the film.

In the folklore, when a fool goes on adventure, he does not know where he is going. Instead he follows the whim and lets a higher providence lead his way.[250] Traditionally this higher providence is God. While Aleksandrov could not make his hero rely on God to lead the way in a Soviet film, Kostya's reliance on higher providence becomes clear already during the first minutes of the film from the song he sings while leading his herd through the countryside. The song, which gets repeated several times in the film, has an especially revealing refrain, written and translated below:

247 Ward, 1993, 39 & 77.
248 Haney, 1999, 90.
249 His surname is likely derived from the Russian word *потеха* (potekha), which means fun and amusement. Thus he continues the folk tradition of defining the character by his or her name, as observed by Sokolov (2012, 242) and Sinyavsky (2001, 15). Using this convention was not exclusive to Aleksandrov. In Dovzhenko's film *Aerograd*, for example, the protagonist (an old hunter who has lived his whole life in one of the country's most remote regions) is called Glushak, derived from the word *глушь*, (glush'), "hinterland" or "backwater".
250 Sinyavsky, 2001, 19 and Emerson, 2008, 39 – 40.

Нам песня жить и любить помогает,	The song helps us to live and to love,
Она как друг и зовёт и ведёт.	It calls and leads like a friend.
И тот, кто с песней по жизни шагает,	And he who walks in life with the song,
Тот никогда и нигде не пропадёт.	Never and nowhere gets lost.

Replacing the word "song" with the word "God" in the above text would not change its message. Especially noteworthy are the parts saying that the song "calls and leads", and that with the song one never "gets lost". While this could be interpreted simply as a way for the singer to say that being happy and carefree is a good way to live one's life, it also effectively shifts the responsibility from the singer to something or someone else. The responsible other leads and the singer, much like the classical fool, simply follows and everything turns out well for him. This is a far cry from the socialist plot discussed earlier: in that plot the hero would specifically aim to *lose* such spontaneity.

Based on what has been established so far, it would be plausible to assume that Kostya is singing the song in the beginning to show how spontaneous and still unsophisticated he is, and then assume that in the course of the film he would abandon the song and the attitude in favor of a more proper ideological view. But Kostya does not really at any point of the story reach that part of the socialist plot. Instead, the film ends much like it began: Kostya sings the very same song, only this time he does it in finer clothing and in grander setting than in the beginning. And this time he does not sing it with only several children either, but instead with Anyuta, his band, and the whole audience of the Bolshoi Theater, underlining very strongly that this song and its message are the film's main points. This is further reinforced by the fact that instead of changing himself in the film, Kostya instead changes everyone else by having the audience sing the song with him, whereas they at first laughed at him and his band. The fool gets his happy ending, and it follows the folklore's rather than socialism's convention, because in the former he would also achieve it not by becoming any wiser, but precisely by being the fool that he was.[251]

In addition to his song, Kostya's whimsical fool's nature can be observed several times in the film. One of them is the part where he goes on his journey to Moscow. When Kostya learns that his beloved Yelena has left, we see already in the next scene that he has arrived to Moscow to find her. Technically this could be seen as something that a fool would not do: after all, when he leaves, Kostya knows exactly where he is going and why. On the other hand, the decision is still whimsical, and fits Sinyavsky's account of having fool follow the first idea that comes to his mind, no matter how bad it is.[252] In this particular case, the decision is realistically thinking really bad. By this part

251 Emerson, 2008, 39 – 40.
252 Sinyavsky, 2001, 19.

of the film we know that Kostya's and Yelena's relationship has not lasted for long: they have met each other only twice, and the second meeting at Yelena's house ended in a disaster. We also know that Kostya is a shepherd, and not just any shepherd, but (as he proudly proclaims it himself) the one in charge.[253] Despite of this, he abandons his former life to pursue a woman he hardly even knows. The obvious explanation for this, of course, is the story. Aleksandrov could not just abruptly end the film by having Kostya continue his life as a shepherd after Yelena leaves. But as a narrative decision it fits Kostya's personality, which has been established from the beginning of the film. It would have been far more difficult for Aleksandrov to have his next male protagonist, Martynov of *Circus*, to do the same because the characters are completely different. Aleksandrov needed a familiar folk tale fool, not a serious and grim new man hero, to justify this turn in the plot.

In the folklore the fool survives despite of his foolishness because he is lucky and miracles always come to his aid.[254] This fits Kostya perfectly, as far more often than not he does not solve problems himself, but the problems solve themselves for him. It is pure luck that Yelena mistakes him for a famous conductor. When they have the dialogue[255] leading to Yelena inviting him to visit her later in the evening, Kostya neither lies to her, nor understands what is going on. Such dialogue, in which the viewer knows that the characters are not talking about the same thing while they do not, is obviously a comedic trick by Aleksandrov to make the audience laugh. But it is also a vital stroke of luck for Kostya in order to move the plot forward, because without of it, a shepherd like Kostya would never be allowed to meet a rich and cultured girl like Yelena (unless he saved her from a proverbial dragon, which would make him a different kind of tale hero altogether). Such luck of the fool is not nearly as evident in Aleksandrov's other protagonists, who prosper more due to their own virtues and character. A good example of this is Tanya from *The Radiant Path.* Both she and Kostya rise in the social hierarchy (Tanya from a maid to an engineer and Kostya from a shepherd to a musician), but Tanya does it through her own hard work, whereas to Kostya the good things seem to simply happen.

While Kostya's behavior in the film in general can only rarely be described as rational, there are two scenes where he fits the role of a classic folk tale fool especially well. Chronologically the first of them is when Kostya arrives to Yelena's house and has all his animals following him. As a mere act this is possibly the most absurd part of the film. Even a fool should understand that having his whole herd follow him to Yelena's fine house is not a good idea. Aleksandrov also does not offer

253 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:40:52 – 00:41:09.
254 Emerson, 2008, 39 – 40.
255 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:16:29 – 00:18:42.

any explanation for why Kostya has decided to have his cattle accompany him for this occasion when he himself is still dressed like a gentleman instead of a shepherd. In a way it highlights his lack of wisdom. Kostya is intelligent enough to understand that certain occasions have certain dress codes, but that does not make him any wiser, because he still acts like a shepherd. This could also be Aleksandrov subtly making fun of the aforementioned stereotype of an educated Soviet peasant, who could be formally very educated but in his heart and mind still a simple peasant. However, trying to come up with the explanation for this does not make a difference in this case.

As can be expected, the fool causes problems with his foolishness, both in folklore and in the film. Like the classic Emelya the Fool, who would accidentally run over people with his magical sled because he did not know he should tell them to get out of the way, Kostya and his animals manage to wreck Yelena's house, ruin her party and make her mother faint.[256] But like the classic fool, Kostya is despite of this a sympathetic character. He is not malicious and he certainly did not intend to disappoint Yelena. While he tried to hide the animals in vain before getting caught, Kostya still acts in a rather oblivious manner even when Yelena's mother confronts[257] him about his true identity, even kindly correcting her about his title: not an ordinary shepherd, but the one in charge. But Kostya's sympathetic nature does not save him from being expelled from Yelena's house. This expulsion also serves as the lowest point of his story and is the only time in the film when he is seen being genuinely sad instead of his usual happy go lucky antics. Sinyavsky identifies such low point as being an important part of the classical fool's story too.[258] The hero has to go through this nadir in his life for the things to start magically turning better for him in the story. He proverbially dies and is born again. But unlike the more heroic wonder tale hero, whose climax is the part when he changes and becomes the hero, the fool does not truly change. Instead, he is again helped by his luck, a miracle, and his foolish nature.

In Kostya's case the change follows his life's lowest point literally right after he is seen despairing for being expelled and subsequently hearing that Yelena is going away. Aleksandrov emphasizes the change in the story by changing its setting completely. Instead of his native countryside, Kostya is now seen standing in Moscow. Moscow, with its shining electric lights, blinking neon signs, cars and enormous buildings could itself be described as a magical "other world" to a peasant like Kostya. It is a natural setting for a miracle to happen to him, and was likely so also to a peasant who would see the film far away from the real city. Traveling was not as simple as it is nowadays, and

256 For the story of Emelya the Fool, see Sinyavsky, 2001, 20 – 21.
257 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:40:52 – 00:41:49.
258 Sinyavsky, 2001, 14.

thus it was perfectly possible that such ordinary peasant would not ever in reality get to visit Moscow, but see it only in pictures and films.[259] The contrast that Aleksandrov shows between the countryside and the city is striking, and in the context of 1930s also conveys a certain sense of miracles already through the latest technological inventions of the capital. This choice is not entirely coincidental, but also has a background in the contemporary Soviet society. The importance of Moscow as the country's modern capital was starting to get increasingly emphasized from the year 1933 onwards and much money was spent for its modernization.[260] Thus Aleksandrov's first comedy, as well as his latter ones, participated in this process.

This change of scene into a more wondrous and magical is where Kostya's new life is going to begin. But contrary to what might be expected from a socialist plot, new life does not mean the birth of a new Kostya. This becomes evident instantly in the first Moscow scene, which acts as the second important occasion of demonstrating Kostya's foolishness. He arrives in front of a theater to see that conductor Fraschini (the one he was mistaken for earlier) is having a concert in there. Suddenly he gets hired from the street to help the theater staff carry flower decorations into the theater. But Kostya does not manage this simple task because his whimsical nature again comes into play. He sees several choir girls and decides that rather than carrying the decorations, he would impress the girls by giving the flowers to them. This of course causes trouble and Kostya is chased around the theater by the staff. He bumps into Fraschini and accidentally drops him through a trapdoor. Then, again helped by simple luck, he ends up in the conductor's podium in front of the orchestra and is mistaken for Fraschini. But Kostya does not understand this. Instead, he spots Yelena in the audience and tries to attract her attention with gestures. While Kostya fools around the podium, the orchestra reacts to his every move, and he once more is completely oblivious to this. In the end the theater's staff finds him again, but he is miraculously saved by a group of men who saw him "conducting" and think he would make a fine leader for their jazz band.

It is at this point that Kostya takes a step away from being a traditional fool and momentarily resembles a more socialist hero type. He gets followers and becomes a leader, but as a character it is impossible to apply Kenez's Soviet leader archetype to him. Kostya does not suddenly become an ascetic, militaristic or emotionless person, a saint-like figure distancing himself from the common people, like Kenez's model implies.[261] While he certainly knows how to solve problems for his band and inspire them, he essentially stays as the same carefree Kostya. His new band, on the other hand,

259 Taylor, 2011, 213.
260 Clark, 2011b, 15.
261 Kenez, 2001, 144.

very much resembles Emerson's Soviet archetype of the masses needing a leader to guide them.[262] The viewer does not get to know them at all: they do not even have names and none of them gets enough attention to really stand out as an individual in the film. The only way to really describe them is as a character called the band.

The band's need for a leader is not only hinted when they spontaneously ask Kostya to join them, but is also made very obvious in the scene[263] following the events in the theater. In this scene we see Kostya rehearsing with his band in order to play at the Bolshoi Theater later. The masses, through the band, are depicted in the scene like being an explosive substance simply waiting to explode if someone is not controlling it. Early in the scene one of the band members becomes extremely irritated because he hears some noises from behind a wall and claims he cannot rehearse in such conditions. Kostya solves the problem by volunteering to go and complain. But from this point on, when the band loses its leader, everything starts going downhill. The band members immediately start arguing and end up fighting with each other. Salys has noted that this scene is influenced by Hollywood, as such fights where people are using something not meant for harming (like the band members are using their instruments) to hurt each other is a typical joke in American films.[264] Technically the whole scene could exist for that purpose with no further connotations. However, in a Soviet film it also serves to show how irrational and in need of the guidance of a leader the people are, since it happens literally right after Kostya has left the room. Interpreted this way, this is possibly the strongest depiction of Soviet ideology that can be identified in *Happy Guys*.

When Kostya and the landlord come back, they find the band exhausted from fighting. When the landlord threatens to evict them, the band members become depressed. They are suddenly unanimous that there is no place in whole Moscow for them to rehearse in, and thus their dream of playing in the Bolshoi Theater is crushed. But Kostya, being the leader, immediately has a plan. To start it, he only needs to vaguely claim that he knows where to rehearse and tell the rest to follow him. And the band members will. They gather their instruments and rush after him in excitement, as if they had not only seconds earlier acted like the end of the world was coming. The band's changing mood from one extreme to another – from fury and anger to crushing despair and then elated excitement – in less than seven minutes is rather comical in itself, but its main function is clearly reinforcing the Soviet ideology and fulfilling that requirement in the film.

262 Emerson, 2008, 202.
263 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:01:52 – 01:08:35
264 Salys, 2009, 36.

Kostya shows his leadership again twice after this scene. First he gets his band to play without instruments in Bolshoi Theater, even when the audience is laughing at them.[265] Moments later he encourages Anyuta to sing, despite of her being scared of the audience, and thus helps her to realize her true potential.[266] Despite of these examples of Kostya taking the role of a leader, he is far more a folk tale hero than a Soviet or Hollywood hero. The important part is that even if Kostya temporarily shows leadership qualities, he does not truly at any point change. When he manages to get his discouraged band to carry on the concert in the Bolshoi Theater, he does it in a foolish way. He does not give them an encouraging speech or do something heroic to inspire them. Instead he insists that they make fools of themselves in front of a large audience, in one of the country's most prestigious sanctuaries of culture. And it miraculously works. The audience stops laughing, starts applauding, and in the end is heard singing along with Kostya, Anyuta, and the band. The song is no other than the one heard during the first minutes of the film.[267]

The moral of Kostya's story thus is not typical for the Socialist Realism, because he specifically has gone through the whole film by being a fool and thus taught the audiences his own, and not the socialist philosophy of what is important in life. This resembles the fool in folk tales teaching the audiences that it is not always the most important thing to be wise and educated, essentially downplaying some of the esteemed virtues of the folk tale's era.[268] This was going to change already in Aleksandrov's next film. But before delving deeper into this change, let us take a look at the other characters of *Happy Guys*, and their resemblance to the folklore.

4.3 Anyuta: the Ugly Duckling

Happy Guys is not different from Aleksandrov's other films only because of its apparent lack of ideology. The other striking difference is that its protagonist is undeniably the male Kostya Potekhin, whereas the subsequent films are increasingly stories of the female characters played by Lyubov Orlova. While Orlova appears in *Happy Guys* as Anyuta, her role is auxiliary at the best. She is seen only rarely in the film and from the plot's perspective exists mostly for Kostya to have his happy, romantic ending. However, Anyuta also has a very distinctive role, which fits both the socialist and folk narrative: she changes, or rather, she gains some sort of higher consciousness by turning with Kostya's help from the beginning's simple maid into a self-respecting singer. Thus

265 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:14:41 – 01:16:13
266 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:20:45 – 01:23:52
267 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:26:24 – 01:30:11
268 Sinyavsky, 2001, 19.

Anyuta resembles the Danish Hans Christian Andersen's famous story of the "Ugly Duckling", or any similar story where the character who initially seems like the worst of all turns out to be something completely else in the end.

This kind of plot is very often seen in Russian folk tales.[269] Though if Aleksandrov was following strictly the folk tale tradition in this, he would have made Kostya to be the Ugly Duckling, and not a supporting character like Anyuta. It should be noted that he used the same motif later in *The Radiant Path* where the heroine goes through a somewhat similar transformation, only this time as the film's protagonist and with a stronger Soviet undertone. But it would still be somewhat questionable to outright claim that Aleksandrov did this specifically because it is used in the Russian folk tales. The roots of this motif may be in the Russian folk culture but, as shown by using Andersen as an example, it is a more universal phenomenon.

The first thing that the viewer learns about Anyuta's life is that she is held back by Yelena. Yelena claims being a singer to Kostya, yet she is seen singing only once in the film (and rather poorly too), whereas Anyuta sings more often and is good at it: a fact that seemingly irritates her employer to no end, as is seen in Anyuta's first long appearance. She is properly introduced in the scene[270] where Yelena is preparing her party and waiting for Kostya to arrive. Anyuta is happily singing until abruptly cut short by Yelena, who tells her to go dress up for the occasion. This part of the film is copying Disney's cartoon *Steamboat Willie* from 1928. Disney's film opens with Mickey Mouse whistling at the helm of a steamboat, until he is interrupted by Pete who then orders him to go below the decks.[271] Aleksandrov made his homage to Disney's film very clear by having Anyuta even re-enact the part where Mickey at first pretends to leave, but quickly turns, sticks out his tongue and makes a "thbb" noise at Pete: an act of defiance that at first does not seem to fit Anyuta's character, but foreshadows her change and what is to come later in the film.[272] However, it also serves a narrative purpose of showing that the film has another noteworthy female character at odds with Yelena.

Anyuta appears every once in a while during the scenes where Kostya's animals ruin Yelena's party,

269 Sinyavsky, 2001, 12.
270 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:20:19 – 00:23:22.
271 Disney & Iwerks, 1928, 00:00:18 – 00:01:16.
272 This homage is not the only time Aleksandrov closely and openly imitated Hollywood films. A similar example would be the quiet, Chaplin-like character in Aleksandrov's second film *Circus*. For a more in-depth study of these cases, see Salys, 2009.

and her attraction to Kostya is also visually hinted[273] during these events, but her next real appearance is in the scene[274] after Kostya's expulsion from Yelena's house. Anyuta brings Kostya a message, letting him know that Yelena is leaving. However, she quickly digresses from her task and insists on talking only about herself and asking questions about Kostya. To further underline her character, she suddenly tries to slap Kostya in the face several times, claiming she was trying to kill a mosquito for him. It becomes obvious from the scene that Kostya's character has much more common with Anyuta than Yelena: already in the next scene in Moscow he himself likewise forgets what he was told to do when carrying the decorations. However, in this scene the sad Kostya momentarily ceases to be the story's fool, and Anyuta takes that role for him. In the dialogue, Kostya is the voice of reason trying to keep it on topic, and when Anyuta starts slapping him, he outright claims she is crazy, even if such spontaneous acts would not be beyond him either. Although Anyuta at this point is turned down by Kostya, the scene serves as the first major step in her change when she is seen acting more independently from Yelena. She starts turning from a simple maid into an independent being in the story, and it happens through her affection for Kostya. This step serves as the foundation for the one she takes in her next appearance.

Anyuta is next seen in the scene[275] following Kostya's rehearsal gone wrong. She is quietly cleaning furniture, while Yelena is practicing singing and seeing how high notes she can sing. This is briefly interrupted several times by showing what Kostya's band is doing meanwhile, but continues[276] right after these mini-scenes. Anyuta listens patiently as Yelena's voice fails all the time. Finally, after yet another failure, Anyuta defies her employer's will and starts singing herself, outmatching Yelena's raspy voice easily. Yelena is unsurprisingly furious, but the imminent argument between the two is interrupted by Yelena's mother, who thought she heard Yelena singing so well. Anyuta's reaction to these events is unambiguous: she walks to the piano, sets down her bucket and throws her cleaning rag into it, standing up straight and emotionless. She is then seen leaving Yelena's house and walking on the streets until the horse cart hired by Kostya's band crashes into her.

By this point the viewer should already know that Anyuta is a good singer. It is the contrast between her initial appearance and this scene that should be more interesting for the analysis. Technically it is not noteworthy to observe that a character in a story experiences character growth. This is so despite of the said character being the only one in the story to really do so: Kostya's foray into being

273 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:33:15 – 00:34:03.
274 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:45:19 – 00:50:09.
275 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:08:35 – 01:09:41.
276 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:10:44 – 01:11:48 & Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:12:36 – 01:14:39.

a leader is shallow, to say the least, and Yelena does not get even that. Anyuta's growth in the whole story's context fits the folk tradition of the worst becoming the best, but this particular step in her process also resembles the socialist world the films depict. Anyuta, a so far oppressed worker, defies her clearly bourgeois employer. The defiance is not just her spontaneously showing she can sing better than Yelena, but made very clear by her throwing away her tools too. It is not shown in the film what happens between this scene and her leaving the house, but her attitude implies that she might be leaving on her own initiative. This would make her a more revolutionary character than the traditional folk tale heroine, who is forced to leave her home in order to go on a journey. The folklore also would have given her a choice: she could have as well acted like Cinderella, quietly accepting her fate and waiting for a miracle to happen. Her choice separates her from the typical folklore characters, and also from some of Aleksandrov's other female protagonist, as two of the remaining three (Dixon of *Circus* and Tanya of *The Radiant Path*) are explicitly driven out of their homes in the beginning of their films.

However, Anyuta's defiance still does not make her a fully fledged revolutionary character, and seems like a separate solution rather than a message her character would be meant to convey. For Anyuta to be a conveyor of a more socialist moral, the whole film would need to take a step into a more ideological direction. Anyuta's defiance happens too late in the film and is not taken any further than that. She simply leaves her employer's house and the matter is considered resolved. In addition, *Happy Guys* completely lacks the kind of ending that can be found in other films, where a character would in the end of the film explain to the audience in no uncertain terms what the moral of the story is.[277] Therefore the film's general nature does not support her character suddenly turning into a revolutionary heroine, and neither does she do so in film's ending scenes[278] where she features next.

In the first part[279] of these scenes Anyuta is seen waiting for the band in the cart with the driver. The driver offers her a thick cloth and some alcohol to stay warm. Anyuta takes the cloth, but refuses the alcohol, insisting that she does not drink, but the driver forces her to drink anyway. On the first glance Anyuta's temperance could be seen as a virtue, much like in the folk tale the female heroine was also the embodiment of the virtues the story wanted to uphold. However, for it to be a plausible theory the film came out too late. It is true that there was a temperance movement in the Soviet

277 For such ending, see for example Eisenstein, 1986, 01:42:03 – 01:43:11 ; Dovzhenko, 1935, 01:15:30 – 01:16:47 ; Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:24:26 – 01:24:57 & Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:38:08 – 01:40:16.
278 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:16:13 – 01:29:42.
279 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:16:13 – 01:17:04.

Union in the beginning of the 1930s. It did not last long, however, because Stalin wanted to use the revenues from alcohol sales to fund the state's expenses, and vodka soon became an ordinary commodity in the stores.[280] Seeing that from the 1933 onwards he and the members of the Politburo examined all the films before they got permission to be released, it seems likely that especially in this time, when the change of direction was still rather new, a film being outspokenly against alcohol would not get such permission. And even if for the sake of the argument it is proposed that Aleksandrov did not care here about the state's values but considered temperance a virtue himself, it still does not work for Anyuta. She does not really fit the mold of a virtue embodying heroine, because she does not seem to embody any other real virtues, socialist or otherwise. She is simply too much of a supporting character in the film to do so. A more likely explanation for why Aleksandrov decided to use the alcohol in this scene was because he needed Anyuta drunk in the next scene for story's purposes, and it was plausible for her to become so from a small amount of alcohol if she was not a drinker otherwise.

Anyuta's drunkenness, on the other hand, serves well her actual role in the film, the Ugly Duckling's change into a swan. Her next major appearance is in the scene[281] where she and the driver go look for the band in the theater. If Kostya's story changed after the lowest point in his story, it could be argued that Anyuta's does the same. While she is not outright depressed, it is hard to deny that she is miserable in this scene. Without work or a place to go, soaked from the rain outside, drunk and scared. It is in this miserable state that she has a miracle happen to her, and the audience witnesses it in a very visual way. In front of the audience's eyes, Anyuta literally changes[282] from a wet and scared drunk into a singer in fine clothing and makeup.

This change could not happen without Kostya's encouragement. From the Socialist Realism's point of view this could be argued to fit the master plot perfectly: the elder party mentor guides the heroine into achieving greater consciousness and with Kostya's help Anyuta realizes her true potential. However, this explanation fails because Kostya himself could hardly be described as an elder party mentor, and this is the only time he really helps Anyuta in changing, whereas Anyuta's defiance of Yelena was her own initiative. What could be said about Anyuta's change then? Examining her from the beginning to the end of the film, it seems clear that this is the moment her character was meant for, and what happened before was building up for it. Thus it could be called the story of Ugly Duckling with Socialist Realism influences. The framework remains the same, but

280 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 44.
281 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:19:09 – 01:22:09.
282 Aleksandrov, 1978, 01:21:54 – 01:22:09.

it is complemented by the motifs of oppressed worker emancipating herself, and then being aided by a leader and mentor character (how ever poorly Kostya himself resembles that character's model) to fully achieve the change. While Kostya strongly resembles a folk tale's fool, Anyuta is a mix of both cultures, and her character can be explained in many ways. Such is not the case with her employer who, while not really an ideological enemy per se, represents a different kind of world.

4.4 Yelena: the Antagonist's Otherness

Much like Anyuta is an interesting character in Aleksandrov's films for being a female, yet not being a protagonist, Yelena is likewise an exceptional for being Aleksandrov's only female antagonist.[283] As such, it is difficult to find her a direct counterpart in the male dominated world of fairy tales. That is not to say that the Russian tales would not know female antagonists. The most famous them is undoubtedly the witch Baba-Yaga.[284] However, Yelena can hardly be compared to a man eating witch. She is mean, arrogant and capricious, but she is not evil per se. Aleksandrov also treats her fairly well compared to his other antagonists. Whereas most of her counterparts are at least humiliated and in some cases possibly arrested, Yelena simply disappears from the story without an explanation. Therefore, her background has to be opened from another perspective.

Salys has observed that Aleksandrov's use of the so called "love triangle" in the film is a typical motif in American musicals.[285] Thus it is clear from the early parts of the film that Kostya and Anyuta are the film's real romantic couple, but Yelena is needed to act as the third side of that triangle, so that Kostya can then abandon her in favor of Anyuta. It is noteworthy that to enhance this role, Aleksandrov has made Yelena a firm opposite of Anyuta. The difference begins already from their appearance, which is traditionally color coded to represent opposites of good and evil or day and night. Anyuta is a blonde favoring white clothing, whereas Yelena has dark hair and usually wears black. Yelena is rich and appreciates high culture, whereas Anyuta is poor, modest, and her songs are more low culture romances than Yelena's preferred classical orchestra. The differences go on further, but listing them one by one is hardly necessary.

It could be argued that these differences represents the dualism, which was strongly present in the

283 *The Radiant Path* features a minor female antagonist (Tanya's mistress) as well, but she is not comparable to Yelena due to her small role in the film.
284 Baba Yaga can also help the protagonist in some tales, but for her nature I am going to treat her essentially as a villain in this context. See Haney, 1999, 98 – 99.
285 Salys, 2009, 74.

pre-revolutionary peasants' world and folklore and therefore supposedly important and familiar for both the audiences and Aleksandrov.[286] The observation, however, is so universal in nature that it would require Yelena to be a strongly folkloric character in some other way too. That she is not, and the differences exist for the story's rather than the character's purposes. They underline the film's message from the very beginning when Kostya and Yelena meet for the first time: these people are not meant for each other. Even when they seem to be talking about the same thing, they really are not, as is apparent in their first dialogue.[287] Instead there is a socialistic class tension mixed in with the American genre convention in contrasting starkly, how the lower class hero Kostya finally finds his true love from also lower class Anyuta, not the bourgeois Yelena.[288]

Yelena's bourgeois nature allows Aleksandrov to make some fun of the culture she represents and in this way again reinforce the otherwise weakly present ideology. However, the division between the peasants and the more affluent social classes (the nobility, clergy and the merchants) was not uncommon in the folk tales either. It was used especially in the tales of everyday life and "the other" was treated usually in a hostile manner. Nevertheless, Aleksandrov's depiction of Yelena and her kind does not strongly resemble this tradition either. For instance, a common motif in such tale was having a seemingly simple peasant outwit the wiser and more educated noble.[289] Another common plot was having the story depict a poor man and a rich man, and in the end having the poor become rich, and the rich become poor.[290] Anyuta and Kostya do neither of these, nor does Yelena lose her affluence. While Anyuta technically wins Yelena during the film, it is made clear from early on in the story that they are at least equals as singers. Anyuta's victory over Yelena is not a surprise nor her story's central theme like it should in a folkloric depiction be.

Yelena's role in this regard is therefore more to provide the audience a glance into her world and depict that world in certain light rather than being an evil defeated by the protagonists. The most prominent depiction of this is Yelena's party at the *Black Swan*. The differentiating between the peasant and bourgeois cultures starts already when Kostya has just arrived and Yelena is trying to introduce him to her mother. Kostya makes a joke[291] about the house's decorative statue that has no hands. He says that if the farm workers had no hands, they could not milk the cows and it would be a disaster. Everyone except Yelena laughs. Pitting the peasant's practical sense of humor against the

286 Haney, 1999, 48 – 49.
287 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:16:29 – 00:18:42.
288 Salys, 2009, 74.
289 Sokolov, 2012, 471.
290 Sokolov, 2012, 487.
291 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:26:03 – 00:26:20.

bourgeois lifestyle is not unlike the peasants finding the horse paintings in Bolshevik agitation trains amusing. Appealing to something as basic as the notion of what is fun is a very strong way for separating Kostya's peasant culture from Yelena and also appealing to the likely peasant audience. Part of the joke's fun is the fact that Yelena does not get it, thus making the bourgeois "other" appear in unfavorable light and even as somewhat stupid.

The scene[292] where animals break into the dining room and find the dinner waiting for the guests is outright mocking the typical dinner party and its participants. Aleksandrov spends approximately two minutes without using a single line of dialogue but still saying a lot. The fine order of the neatly set dinner table is destroyed. A bull is seen drinking from the punch bowl; pigs, rams and donkeys (all very symbolic animals and no doubt intentionally chosen) are running on the table and competing with each other for the food; a pig is wearing a napkin, and the bull is staggering around the room, apparently drunk. The scene's end is crowned by a shot of a particularly hairy little pig lying on the messy table with its eyes closed, smacking and burping happily. Apart from being obviously a comic scene, such use of the montage technique and the animals does not leave a lot of room for interpreting what it was meant to say.

Yelena is again used to mock high culture in the scene[293] where Kostya accidentally becomes a conductor for a classical orchestra. Although she as a character is not paid much attention to, she can still be seen as the driving force in this scene like in the previous one since Kostya is in the theater because of her. While this scene has only very little dialogue and is clearly meant for non-verbal comedy, perhaps even imitating Chaplin's films, it also carries a message. Kostya, a shepherd with very little musical training, replaces by accident a famous conductor. And yet the concert does not suffer from it. On the contrary, the orchestra's playing according to Kostya's unwitting directions makes people cry out of happiness, gasp and even compliment it for being a very original interpretation. Even Yelena and her mother in the audience are shocked to see Kostya on the podium, thinking they accidentally expelled a real conductor from their house. At no point does anyone seem to suspect that something is wrong except for the camera briefly showing the confused face of one member of the orchestra. Essentially the film is saying that this esteemed and likely an expensive concert is a farce. It shows that any fool like Kostya is capable of arranging such concert without anyone noticing the difference. It therefore portrays both the culture and its adherents as superficial: appearing sophisticated on the outside, yet not really having a content that would matter.

292 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:31:19 – 00:33:15.
293 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:54:26 – 00:58:05

This criticism is later continued in the film's ending scenes when Kostya and his band manage to have a concert in the likewise prestigious Bolshoi Theater without having functioning instruments.

Yelena's character is also mocked in the scene[294] following right after this. Once the concert is over and the audience starts applauding, Yelena runs to Kostya and starts bowing for the audience as if this successful concert was somehow her doing. Kostya, on the other hand, looks confused and does not do anything. Yelena also apologizes to him, blaming her mother for the mistake of driving Kostya away from their house. In short, Yelena is shown to be opportunistic and showing affection to Kostya only because of his apparent success as a conductor. This is a strong contrast to Anyuta whose affection was genuine. Kostya's eventual choice between Yelena's hollow love and Anyuta's real emotion further underlines Aleksandrov's depiction of the bourgeois culture through Yelena. The bourgeois Yelena could never love an ordinary shepherd, no matter what he was like as a person. On the other hand, she is eager to show affection and also take part of the fame enjoyed by a famous conductor, who is still the same person as the shepherd, although she does not know it.

The ingenuity and opportunism as opposed to down to Earth spontaneity of Anyuta are some of the key features that make Yelena an antagonist, but her role in the film is not so much to act as an independent character as to act as a way for Aleksandrov to make fun of her culture. This alone makes her a more a Soviet than a folkloric antagonist because she is used as an instrument for social criticism. Such criticism was a common aspect of the Soviet films because naturally if they were to convey a message of the new and better world through their positive heroes, they also had to show what was possibly threatening this ideal. Therefore Yelena is a reflection of the era's ideology. But Yelena is still unlike most Soviet antagonists and even most of Aleksandrov's antagonists in that she herself is rather meaningless and gets overshadowed by the social criticism for which she is used. This was to change already in Aleksandrov's next film from which on he also took the more common approach of showing the enemy as personally evil. But before that gets discussed, a brief summary of the first film and its relation to the folklore may still be made now that its major characters have all been discussed.

4.5 Moral of the Story

It is no wonder that *Happy Guys* received criticism for the lack of ideology when it was released. As far as moral of the story goes, there hardly is one, at least when thinking from an educational Soviet

294 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:58:05 – 00:59:18.

film's point of view. There is no obvious message, no point that the film tries repeat over and over again, and no lesson that it is trying to teach its audience. It is not didactic in the way the Soviet films were supposed to be. Some time later Aleksandrov himself came up with a moral for the story, stating that the film shows how in the Soviet Union every talented person gets an opportunity, despite of his or her wealth or social class.[295] This, however, is a shallow explanation. The film would have been very different if Aleksandrov had started directing it using this idea as his main inspiration. His own recalling[296] at the beginning of the film's 1978 version offers a simple but more plausible explanation: the times were difficult and the people wanted to see cheerful films.

The most obvious explanation to the film's lack of ideology is its year of release. The year 1934 was also the year of the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, where the Socialist Realism became the official ideology that would soon encompass all aspects of the culture, not only literature. *Happy Guys* is therefore a distinctive film because, while it does have some ideological content, it is not yet as strongly effected by the Socialist Realism's attempts to create an unified culture. It is also the first Soviet musical comedy, a product imported from the Hollywood. All this contributes to it being different from what a Soviet film otherwise would and should have been.

How then is the pre-revolutionary folk tale culture present in such product? As has been observed in the character analysis, the film is not only copying Hollywood, but Aleksandrov uses many folk tale motifs in his first film.[297] Considering the film's lack of ideology, however, it is difficult to claim that he did so in order to teach something to the audiences. Kostya is hardly the ideal new man, hard working and always vigilant, stoic and ready to defend socialism and the motherland from its enemies. Yelena serves as the plot's antagonist, but not as a proper enemy. Aleksandrov's characters also do not serve any visible agitation purpose. The film is not about building socialism at all, nor does it incite patriotic emotions. While there are some features that resemble the official socialist doctrine, *Happy Guys* is all in all simply a funny comedy with some American influences.

Examining the folk tale influences in this light, the answer to their use seems simple. The folk tale fool was an inherently comic character and there was no reason to start repairing what was not broken in the first place: he would still fit his comedic purpose perfectly. Anyuta's development, on the other hand, brings some drama to accompany the comedy and enhances Kostya's happy ending

295 Salys, 2009, 101.
296 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:00:21 – 00:00:38.
297 This is not to say that Hollywood and folk culture could not overlap, but since the folk tales are much older than any Hollywood film, the aforementioned observations can be attributed to them.

by seeing the poetic justice served when the Ugly Duckling finally becomes the story's swan. In short, Aleksandrov already had many elements for the story build in the folk culture that the people knew and he only had to use them. Whether he used them intentionally to appeal to the audiences, or if they just felt natural to him, is an impossible question to answer at this point of the study, but the relationship certainly exists in the film and it also passed the Soviet censorship.

But even after identifying the relationship in the first film, the thesis cannot conclude here. As the doctrine of Socialist Realism became more unified and the state's grip on the film industry tightened over the years, artists like Aleksandrov also had to adapt to the new environment. *Happy Guys* in an exception in the quartet. Therefore the question at this part of the source analysis is clear: what happened to the folk culture in the later films then, when they became clearly more didactic and adherent to the official culture's demands? How did the characters change when the concept of new man became a more integral part of the films and teaching the old men to become new was a task that could no longer be easily ignored? Was there still room for the fool and other folk heroes in the new socialist world?

5. *Circus*

The year 1936 comes up in the Soviet history often as the beginning year of the Great Purge. The murder of Sergei Kirov in 1934 had put an end to the relatively liberal break in the decade.[298] The assassination was used as a justification for thousands of arrests and tightening of the state's line.[299] By the time *Circus* was filmed and premiered, situation remained as such. Considering this gloomy background, it is no wonder that it is different from its predecessor, even radically so. Its clear message and repeating of many of the state's official lines and myths may contribute to it being, according to Prokhorov, possibly also one of the most studied Soviet films.[300] Holmgren offers an explanation other than the era's social atmosphere, suggesting that *Circus* and its political nature are Aleksandrov's own justification for his own work, and with such justification he paved the way for his next two films.[301] Seeing the criticism he received from his first film, this seems plausible, but the change is not seen in *Circus* alone. Although *Circus* is arguably his most ideological film, there was at no point in the 1930s a time when Aleksandrov would have gone back to the style seen in *Happy Guys*. This implies that something more than the director himself would have changed.

298 Lewin, 2005, 50.
299 Ward, 1993, 112.
300 Prokhorov, 2007, 1.
301 Holmgren, 2007, 7.

Because of its nature, the film is very easy to approach from the Soviet point of view. Some of the Stalinist myths integrated in the film's 1 hour and 28 minutes include "the Soviet New Man, the Great Family, the spontaneity-consciousness paradigm of Socialist Realism, the archetype of the Leader, racial equality, international solidarity of workers, [and] state support for mother and children".[302] All of these are rather self-explanatory except perhaps the myth of the Great Family. According to Prokhorov the myth of the Great Family is, generally speaking, a story of origins where a father figure of a film passes "sacred knowledge" to a son figure, thus creating a continuum. In the end this myth serves the purpose commemorating the October Revolution, from where everything in the Soviet history supposedly began.[303] In the general context of the Soviet films this might be accurate, but in *Circus* the myth of the Great Family is also taken literally, seeing that the themes of racial equality and depicting the Soviet citizens as one, unified people are strongly present in the film.

The criticism against the West and the American dream is also strongly present. The American dream in Hollywood film is something that is entirely dependent on the individual's qualities, and not on such things as gender, race, or social class and sexuality.[304] Aleksandrov criticizes this by making the race and to some extent the gender major themes of his film, whereas such questions in the Western films were usually concealed. Thus *Circus* has similar themes as its Western counterparts, but it clearly advocates its own Soviet dream by showing what is wrong with the West. But *Circus* is not only a praise of the Soviet state and way of life. The story and especially its characters, the clearly idealistic new men and their enemies, all reflect influences from the past's folk culture, as shall be seen further below.

5.1 The Film as a Story

Circus tells the story of Marion Dixon, an American circus artist forced to leave her homeland due to having a child with a black man. The film begins with her being chased by a furious mob whose intention without a question is to lynch her. Dixon manages to catch a departing train where she meets the film's antagonist, a German impresario called Franz von Kneishitz. Von Kneishitz quickly discovers Dixon's plight. Appearing at first as her savior, he turns out to be an abusive and violent man who essentially keeps Dixon as hostage by threatening to expose her secret to the public. The pair makes their way to Moscow to perform in a circus. Their performance, *Flight to the Moon*

302 Salys, 2010, 124.
303 Prokhorov, 2010, 29.
304 Strinati, 2000, 27 – 28.

where Dixon acts as a human cannonball, attracts the attention of the circus' director who wants to have a similar attraction of his own instead of paying to von Kneishitz for the performance. He is aided by an old friend, Ivan Martynov, a former soldier having just returned from service. Dixon and Martynov meet each other by chance and quickly fall in love with each other. This worries von Kneishitz. He tries to force Dixon to leave Moscow with him, but Dixon wants to stay in the Soviet Union with Martynov.

With the help of the film's other romantic couple, the director's daughter Raechka and his cannon designer Skameikin, the heroes try to fool von Kneishitz into leaving without Dixon and snatch her child away from him. This, however, goes wrong and von Kneishitz ends up announcing Dixon's secret in circus' ring to the whole audience. But to his great surprise no one is infuriated at Dixon. The multicultural Soviet audience takes the child away from him, and von Kneishitz is forced to leave Circus with two police officers, possibly to be arrested off screen. Dixon and her child are reunited with Martynov, and the circus' director explains to her that in the Soviet Union anyone can have a child of any color. The film ends with Dixon marching in a parade with Martynov and Raechka, telling the latter that now she understands.

As the film's setting, Moscow is once again a magical place in the story. A place where dreams become reality and people change, but it is different from the other films in being the only place where events take place, save for the very beginning of the film. In Aleksandrov's other films people from the countryside inevitably come to Moscow at some point of the story. In *Circus* only Dixon flees to Moscow from the United States in the film's beginning. Taylor has observed that a recurring theme in the films is the characters coming from periphery to Moscow.[305] This is true and from the Soviet point of view also easy to understand. On the one hand, it reinforces Moscow's status as the capital and center of the Soviet Union, even as the center of the world as in the case of *Circus*. On the other hand, it deepens the division between the cities and the countryside, present already in the pre-revolutionary Russia and continued during the early Soviet era: the heroes are often from the countryside and in order to fix their problems, they come to Moscow. Furthermore, it serves as an allegory, which is seen in Aleksandrov's films as well. By first showing the less developed periphery and then comparing it to Moscow's modernity, the films show the country's progress from an agrarian society into a modern, industrialized one.

But in this case Aleksandrov has made an exception to the rule he otherwise follows, and this choice

305 Taylor, 2011, 212.

is consistent with the film's nature. *Circus*, by its nature, is a fairy tale. This nature is enhanced by the choice, since the story does not need to take the usual time in the mundane countryside to reach the magical kingdom. It is otherwise removed from the everyday life of the audiences as well, seeing that the protagonists exceptionally are not peasants or workers but circus artists. The solution resembles the peasants' way of making the heroes in their magical tales nobles like the sons of a Tsar, but on the other hand the characters of *Circus*, like the nobles of the wonder tales, are in the end personalities recognizable for the audiences. By removing the everyday aspect from the film in both scenery and the characters, Aleksandrov had more freedom in conveying his message but also, like the tellers of the old tales, had easier time in separating the audiences from their own reality and taking them into the film's utopian reality.

Circus, unlike the more Hollywood resembling *Happy Guys*, also tells its story in a similar way as Propp and Sinyavsky suggested the Russian wonder tales were told by clearly going from an unhappy situation towards a happy ending unlike the traditional Hollywood narrative going from a harmony in the beginning back to harmony in the end. The folkloric story elements are also present. Whereas Aleksandrov used symbolic animals for fun and conveying a message in *Happy Guys,* in *Circus* he uses another, more mythological method of narrative mostly for conveying a more serious and dramatic message: the mirror. There are two places in the film where this device is used, both with very folkloric connotations. The first time is the scene[306] where Dixon and Martynov meet for the first time and von Kneishitz spies them through a window. While the scene depicts a window, it is practically treated like a mirror. Martynov and von Kneishitz both look at each other through it just as if they were looking at their reflections. Neither does anything, no attempts are made by von Kneishitz to escape or by Martynov to drive him away. Even their expressions do not change much.

Thinking realistically for a moment, the scene is absurd. When two people are being spied by a third one through a window, it should provoke some sort of reaction or at the very least the spying one should try to somehow save himself once caught. But if the window is treated as a folkloric mirror instead of an ordinary window, the scene makes much more sense. A mirror in the traditional Slavic folk beliefs is, among other things, a gate to another world.[307] Thus this use of the window as a mirror establishes the roles of the film's three main characters early in the story by separating them from each other. Martynov and Dixon are on its one side and von Kneishitz is on the other, even though Martynov is a Soviet hero, whereas Dixon and von Kneishitz are both nominally

306 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:20:11 – 00:21:37.
307 Salys, 2009, 317 – 318.

foreigners in the Soviet Union. Von Kneishitz is literally an outsider in the scene, whereas Martynov and Dixon are firmly inside, in a room. The difference between the two worlds – the Soviet and the the outside world – in this case could be taken even further by the contrast of the inside and the outside. The former is warm and illuminated, whereas the latter is (because the events take place in winter) cold and dark. Again, the dualism already present in the peasant tale is strongly present in the film's way of denoting its villain and heroes. For determining which world is on the other side of the mirror, a little political wink is also made by having the German impresario's appearance resemble Hitler: a small but significant detail also noticed by Taylor.[308]

The mirror is used again in the scene[309] where Dixon and Martynov realize for the first time that they love each other. The two are leaning on a grand piano and touch each others' hand. The camera pans to the piano's surface, which reflects their faces. This reflection of the two protagonists continues for a while without anything happening, and all they can be surmised to be doing is watching their own reflection from the instrument. The mirror is here utilized for another folkloric purpose. In the Slavic belief it was thought that mirror could be used to tell the future.[310] Thus this scene is a promise that Dixon and Martynov will be together when the film ends. This promise is then kept by having a very similar picture of the couple shown to the audience in the scene[311] near the end of the film when the director explains the Soviet tolerance to Dixon. Both of these uses of the mirror were likely familiar to the audiences and therefore made it easier for them to follow the fairy tale even when it was now presented as a film, a format very different from the traditional oral stories.

It can already at this point be said that *Circus*, despite of being more clearly a Soviet film than its predecessor, still uses elements of the folk tales to convey its messages. But this still does not tell anything about the more important question: what kind of character archetypes does it have? Storytelling motifs can be, to a certain extent, discarded as simple traditions if the characters are more clearly something completely unfamiliar to the folk culture, because the important educational message was conveyed through them. But, as the analysis below will show, this is not the case.

308 Taylor, 2011, 204 – 205.
309 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:24:30 – 00:25:30.
310 Salys, 2009, 317 – 318.
311 Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:24:26 – 01:24:52.

5.2 Marion Dixon: the Damsel in Distress

Essentially Dixon is like Anyuta. Her story is that of growing up from the beginning's poor situation into becoming something much better at the end of the story. However, that is where the similarity ends. Dixon is by no means another Ugly Duckling, but instead Aleksandrov's first real heroine. This is evident already because *Circus* is more clearly Dixon's story, whereas Anyuta was mostly a supporting character in *Happy Guys*. Anyuta existed for the story's purposes, whereas Dixon is an independent character with a message.

The reason for why Dixon is not an Ugly Duckling is basically that she is not "Ugly". The Dixon seen in the beginning of the film is doing relatively well. Apart from being forced to leave the United States, she is appears to be a successful circus artist, as is evident from the scene[312] depicting her human cannonball performance. Whereas Anyuta was established from her film's beginning as being held back by Yelena and having to realize her true potential, Dixon has no need for that. Despite of otherwise changing in the course of the story and standing up to her oppressor like Anyuta did, she is and remains throughout the film the same talented performer.

Instead Dixon is a more traditional wonder tale's female character. The film at first seems to differ from folk tradition by having a prominent female protagonist, whereas usually the heroes in the tales were men. Aleksandrov's choice to introduce a female protagonist is at first interesting because it is something that does not have roots in the folk tradition, nor in the Soviet culture of the 1920s. However, when Dixon's character is examined more closely, it appears that she still is not equal to her male counterparts. She could best be described as a woman who is on the one hand a heroine, but on the other hand also a damsel in distress. Her abusive relationship with impresario von Kneishitz is revealed in the scene[313] following her performance. From a later scene[314] the audience learns that von Kneishitz blackmails Dixon with her secret of having a black child. Thus, while von Kneishitz is no dragon, Dixon as the story's prominent female is practically his prisoner like in a wonder tale. Her story revolves around breaking free from her imprisonment, not unlike the brief scene in *Happy Guys* where Anyuta cuts her ties with Yelena.

However, *Circus* also mixes the traditions of the wonder tales somewhat. Traditionally it would be up to the tale's male hero, Martynov, to save Dixon from her captor. Aleksandrov, on the other hand, leaves Dixon to save herself, but she does it with Martynov's help. In the subchapter detailing the

312 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:06:41 – 00:15:48.
313 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:17:37 – 00:18:18.
314 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:37:30 – 00:38:17.

wonder tales it was mentioned that the central character would undergo a change by being tested. While this supposes the character triumphing in these tests, it could be surmised that von Kneishitz tests Dixon three times and she is a little more successful each time. Finally the third test leads to her ultimate change.

The first time is the aforementioned scene[315] where von Kneishitz beats Dixon. After following von Kneishitz for a while, the camera cuts back to Dixon to show another scene[316] where she is sitting against a wall and crying. Salys has paid attention to Dixon's wig in this scene, and in the film in general. Dixon is using a black wig, but to symbolize her real nature she takes it away in this scene, revealing to be a blonde in reality, not unlike Anyuta and Yelena were contrasted with colors too.[317] This, however, symbolizes also her first step in the change. She has essentially failed the first test, letting von Kneishitz to beat her and being left to cry. Crudely put, she is shown to be weak. Her weakness is set aside, together with her wig, when she takes from the floor a picture of Martynov and examines it. They also meet physically right after that, because Martynov's baggage has been accidentally delivered to Dixon's room. Thus the process of the damsel in distress becoming free is directly linked to Martynov early in the film.

Later in the film comes a scene[318] where von Kneishitz successfully blackmails Dixon to leave the circus ring with him by threatening to expose her secret. Here Dixon, having received guidance from Martynov earlier[319], is already much more bold. However, she still agrees to leave, being afraid of the persecution she experienced in the United States. Here she also essentially fails the test, but already shows growth which is then shown fully in the very scene[320] following the former. In this analysis' subchapter discussing von Kneishitz it is noticed that he tempts people throughout the film. Dixon's third and final test is one of his tempting attempts. Von Kneishitz begs Dixon to leave Moscow with him, but she disagrees. Infuriated, von Kneishitz starts throwing expensive clothing at her, yelling how he bought them for her and how they cost “thousands of dollars”.[321] Dixon, however, remains calm all the time. Stoic and standing straight, much like her predecessor Anyuta after her final breaking away from Yelena, she lets the clothes pile on her without showing

315 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:17:37 – 00:18:18.
316 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:18:49 – 00:20:12.
317 Salys, 2009, 156 – 158.
318 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:34:30 – 00:35:37.
319 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:21:37 – 00:25:46.
320 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:35:37 – 00:37:30.
321 For a comparison, the performance of von Kneishitz and Dixon in the Soviet circus is stated to cost “500 dollars per month” (Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:28:58 – 00:29:59). Thus the value of such amounts of money is immense, to say the least.

fear or any other emotion.

The scene's most important message is underlined when the camera films Dixon's face directly and have her calmly tell von Kneishitz (and, due the choice of perspective, the audience), that the Dixon he bought these clothes for "is nomore". From a folk tale's perspective, this is the climax of the film. The story's protagonist has finally endured her tests, with the test of greed (very fitting in a Soviet film for an American character like Dixon) being the final one, and ascended into the next level, becoming the heroine we see doing great things for the rest of the film. From the Socialist Realism's perspective it remains the same: the heroine, with the help of Martynov, a Soviet hero and her mentor, has achieved greater consciousness.

From this point on, the film's weight shifts and rather than following Dixon's personal growth, the story focuses on the heroes defeating von Kneishitz. After his defeat, Dixon is seen in the ending parade[322] as a new character. Apart from singing the film's theme song, she only has one but nevertheless a very revealing line of dialogue: she claims to Raechka that now she understands. The Dixon that was earlier has essentially ceased to be as she has attained this understanding in the film. Dixon has in the end become what Aleksandrov was to use in his next two films much more strongly than in *Circus*: a strong heroine, independent and ideal new person rather than a helpless and weak damsel in distress that she was for the most of the film. Starting as a folkloric character, she develops a more apparent Soviet undertone in the course of the film, but her story never fully abandons the folk tale connotations.

Regarding the relationship of folklore and the Soviet film, *Circus* is therefore an interesting hybrid. On the one hand, it has a clear female protagonist in much stronger sense than *Happy Guys* did. On the other hand, the female protagonist is still dependent on the males (both the hero and the antagonist), which was to become completely opposite later in *Volga-Volga* and *The Radiant Path*. It is clearly a Soviet story of Dixon's growth into an ideal new person, yet it also takes an approach familiar from the folklore for dealing with this theme. But how then, in order to use this approach, does it depict the two males that are vital for Dixon's change?

5.3 Ivan Martynov: the Magical Helper and His Gift.

Kostya Potekhin was a classic fool who was difficult to approach from the Socialist Realism's point

322 Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:26:06 – 01:28:47.

of view. His successor, Ivan Martynov, on the other hand, is a character much more fitting to the such mold, perhaps even the best fitting of all of Aleksandrov's characters. He has also been analyzed from this angle in the past in various ways. Salys has argued that his appearance represents the ideals of Stalinist masculinity, which on the other hand is based on the Greek ideals of beauty.[323] His background as a soldier supports this.[324] On the other hand, Salys has also meritoriously approached him from a less obvious angle, noting that he represents the pre-revolutionary *bogatyr* character, which was mentioned in the subchapter detailing the pre-revolutionary culture.[325]

To continue Salys' analysis first from the more apparent point of view, Martynov can be summarized as being a hero. Generally speaking, he is a rather traditional hero: physically imposing, handsome, brave, good by nature and somewhat stone-faced. Compared to the skinny and expressive Kostya, the choice of a new actor instead of Leonid Utyosov must have been a conscious choice to also visually convey the message of the new male lead. Sergei Stolyarov, the actor playing Martynov, was used in similar hero roles in other films too (in Dovzhenko's *Aerograd*, for instance), likely due to his distinctive physical appearance.

More specifically speaking, Martynov is a Soviet hero. He embodies the virtues of physical fitness, patriotism and military background, to name but a few of his features that are clearly the ideals of the film's era. Salys has also noted that his nature fits the archetypical hero of Socialist Realism: calm, self-controlled and not very talkative.[326] In short, he is a new man, the ideal and the idol. In the Soviet context his magical nature comes from this. Martynov is not an ordinary man like the other characters in the film. He is essentially a superman with only positive qualities and no weaknesses. Whereas Dixon is fallible and can be seen crying, Martynov is never depicted in negative light. Unlike Dixon, Martynov also does not change at all in the film. He does not have even brief deviation from his role, unlike Kostya who briefly became a leader before resuming being a fool. He does not need such: on the contrary, it would break the depiction's magic.

While Kostya was a funny character, Aleksandrov has chosen to make his new male protagonist a dead serious person. This is not only because of conveying the more serious political message of the film, but also because of the restrictions set by the Socialist Realism. The film originally had scenes

323 Salys, 2009, 177.
324 Ibid.
325 Salys, 2009, 178.
326 Ibid.

where its heroes were portrayed in a more negative (comic) light, but since the Socialist Realism disallowed this, they could not be buffoons like Kostya.[327] The film still has its fool, Skameikin, but he is mostly marginalized and resembles more a comic relief than a traditional folk tale fool. The times had already changed in that regard. However, not everything had changed. Salys' observation on Martynov resembling a *bogatyr* is a good one, and I am not going to dispute it, seeing that this thesis does not study the epic poetry where these characters featured. Instead I am going to argue that Martynov has a role in the film, familiar from the wonder tales, which does not make him any less important for the story, but takes the spotlight away from his personality and his heroic qualities. This role is that of a magical helper, who would help the story's hero (Dixon in this case) to overcome the tests, and bear a magic gift to help the hero along the way. This archetype, as was mentioned earlier, is recognized by both Sokolov and Propp, and thus it seems so far valid to assume that Aleksandrov could have used a similar character in his films.

As observed, Dixon goes through several tests on her path to becoming the ideal Soviet heroine. The tests were also an integral part of the protagonist's change in the folklore, and there were several conventions for passing them that have correlation to a Socialist Realist plot as well.[328] One of them was accepting advice from the others and thus receiving a magic agent. “The others” in this case is Martynov, Dixon's mentor figure, who also simultaneously serves as the Socialist Realist plot's elder party mentor guiding the heroine in attaining greater consciousness. But there is one problem with outright calling Martynov Dixon's mentor: he does not, in fact, at any point of the story advice her directly on anything. The only scene[329] where someone tells Dixon something about the Soviet Union or the Soviet way of life is at the end of the film when the circus' director explains her the Soviet tolerance of different skin colors.

However, to call the director Dixon's mentor character would make no sense. This role is clearly reserved for Martynov, the conscious new man. Instead of direct advice, he does it with the help of the proverbial magical gift. In Propp's model the gift was given for passing the tests, but Haney proposes that it was essential already for passing the tests, suggesting different traditions.[330] Seeing that in Propp's model it should also be the tester, von Kneishitz, who gives her the gift, Haney's model fits better here by making the helper character also the donor. While Martynov does not give Dixon any magic item literally, he teaches (and thus in a way gives) her a song that ultimately ends

327 Salys, 2009, 130.
328 For further explanation of the conventions, see Haney, 1999, 92 – 93.
329 Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:24:26 – 01:24:52.
330 Haney, 1999, 92 – 93.

up summarizing Dixon's change and her standing up to von Kneishitz. This song, *Song of the Motherland*[331], is an important piece of the film in itself and plays in many scenes where something important related to the plot is happening. Martynov and Dixon are first heard singing it in the scene[332] where he is teaching the song to her. In this scene they sing two stanzas and the refrain, which have all been chosen well to symbolize the lesson helping Dixon's growth. The first stanza goes:

От Москвы до самых до окраин,	From Moscow to the frontiers,
С южных гор до северных морей,	From the Southern mountains to the Northern seas,
Человек проходит, как хозяин,	Man walks like a master,
Необъятной Родины своей.	Through his enormous motherland.

Here the Soviet state's idea of taming the wilderness and the frontiers is reflected well, but putting Moscow again firmly in the middle of the world is not due to this. Instead, as was observed before, such tradition of centralization had longer roots in Russia. Dixon, as an American foreigner, learns the difference between the central and the periphery, in which her native United States also belongs to from the song's point of view. When von Kneishitz later confronts[333] her and lists all the places in the world they could go to, she stays firm, saying she wants to stay in Moscow. This part of the song also promises her something she is sorely lacking with von Kneishitz: independence, mastery over the fate. In the song the man has tamed the vast country's nature. Such mastery of the determined man over the capricious, ancient nature is a victorious achievement, and Dixon proverbially learns that she also can master her own fate, achieving victory as a woman over her patriarchal (and, incidentally, also very capricious) master. The song then continues:

Над страной весенний ветер веет,	The Spring's wind blows over the country,
С каждым днём всё радостнее жить.	Each day the life is more joyful.
И никто на свете не умеет,	And no one in the world can,
Лучше нас смеяться и любить.	Laugh and love better than us.

Seeing that this scene follows almost directly a scene[334] where Dixon was seen weakly crying against a wall, the contrast is immense. The praising of the Soviet happiness is not the only noteworthy lesson in here, but also the metaphorical use of the Spring's wind blowing over the country. The Spring here connotes youthfulness and newness: the time of new growth and the new beginning where the progress is constant and every new day is even better than the previous one. It

331 The song's Russian name *Песня о родине* would translate more accurately as ”Song about the Motherland”, but the literature refers to the song with the above translation, so I will also use it as well.
332 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:21:37 -
333 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:35:37 – 00:37:30.
334 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:18:49 – 00:20:12.

also contrasts the preceding dark and cold winter that is Dixon's former life, not unlike the contrast was made between the inside and the outside world earlier in the scene using a window as a folkloric mirror. Dixon's lesson here is that the dynamic and youthful Soviet Union offers her a chance to have a new beginning. This is something she could not have with von Kneishitz who represents the opposite, the old world where such thing as woman's mastery over her own fate or racial equality were (from the film's point of view) impossible. Finally, the song continues with its refrain:

Широка страна моя родная,	Wide is my native land,
Много в ней лесов, полей и рек.	There are many forests, steppes and rivers in there.
Я другой такой страны не знаю,	I do not know other such countries
Где так вольно дышит человек.	Where man breathes so freely.

This often repeated refrain sums up two of the former stanzas' message in a much more direct way: there are no other countries where Dixon could be free from von Kneishitz. While it also instills patriotic feelings more than the two previous stanzas, here it serves mostly to end Dixon's lesson. The stronger patriotic message at this point of the film is still yet to come.

There is no reason for why Martynov could not have simply told this all to Dixon in plain Russian, like the director delivers his lesson to her and the audience at the end of the film. Aleksandrov would also have been talented enough to do it this way and still keep the story interesting. The song is not needed. Yet it is the content of this song that Dixon uses to change and thus free herself from von Kneishitz. Of course, a song is still no sword: she does not free herself by literally singing at von Kneishitz. But the song's importance is underscored after her victory over him. After their argument follows a scene[335] where Dixon sits down to write a letter to Martynov. On the background the lights of Moscow start lighting up one by one, and not coincidentally the wind (which we remember from the second stanza) starts moving the curtains on Dixon's window. And the song on the background is no other than Martynov's, even using the same stanzas and the refrain in the same order. Her change with the song's help is finalized as she strike's through her original signature ”Marion” and replaces it with a more Russian sounding ”Masha”.

The song still has one more lesson for Dixon to learn on her way to becoming a real heroine. It is is heard in the march scene[336] ending the film, this time sung by Martynov again, reinforcing his role as the helper of Dixon's development (as per folk tale tradition) and her politically conscious mentor

335 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:41:21 – 00:42:24.
336 Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:25:54 – 01:28:47.

(as per Socialist Realism).

Но сурово брови мы насупим,	But we frown our eyebrows hard,
Если враг захочет нас сломать.	If the enemy wishes to destroy us.
Как невесту, Родину мы любим,	We love the motherland like a bride,
Бережём, как ласковую мать.	We defend it like a tender mother.

Such patriotic message is not surprising in a country that believed being surrounded by hostile forces who wished to destroy it. But as was noted earlier, the Soviet concept of being surrounded by hostile forces had its counterpart (not necessarily roots, but definitely a counterpart) in Russia's Orthodox history and, in the end, the country's enormous size. Aleksandrov, while supporting the state's policies here, also continues this tradition, much like his colleagues Dovzhenko and Eisenstein, among others. Despite of the Soviet Union being riddled with the real and perceived domestic enemies in the 1930s, the foreign threat was still very valid choice in a film, and the legendary *bogatyr* standing on guard on the borders was still a valid model for a hero, which likely is also why Salys has observed features of such character in Martynov.

However, if Martynov was a dedicated modern *bogatyr* he would be the hero of the film, not Dixon. His role is rather that of the helper's, and the gift he bears aids the initially weak protagonist in becoming a heroine and overcoming her nemesis. When put in that way, Martynov is a classical wonder tale character. But one could also dismiss this as a purposeful interpretation. Applying Occam's razor and stating that the simplest hypothesis is the correct one, the much more obvious interpretation would be treating him as a character born out of Socialist Realism. And that Martynov, without a doubt, also is, and the magic he offers as a solution is definitely Soviet kind. What has been written above is not meant to say that Aleksandrov, when imagining the role of Martynov in his film, sat down to read wonder tales. On the contrary, it seems rather unlikely when the Socialist Realism's demands already gave him a very similar character in any case. What is interesting here is how the stereotypical Socialist Realism's mentor character and his relationship to the protagonist resemble the ancient wonder tale’s helper characters and their magical gifts. When Gorky praised the folk tradition in 1934, this might not be what he had in mind.

Thus far it seems that both of the good characters, the role models for the new men, one way or another resemble the folk tale traditions. This was true also in Aleksandrov's previous film where Kostya and Anyuta both had their folk tale equivalents. But what then can be said about this film's enemy when his predecessor was more an attack towards the bourgeois culture than a folk tale

character? It would seem like a logical assumption that if *Circus* is much more ideological than *Happy Guys*, then von Kneishitz would also more strongly resemble some contemporary enemy archetype, such as a kulak. But as it happens, the case seems to be the contrary.

5.4 Franz von Kneishitz: The Devil and the Temptation

The German impresario von Kneishitz is not only the film's antagonist. He is the enemy. I use the definite article "the", because von Kneishitz is not only an arguably bad person, like Yelena was, but clearly evil, and in his evilness conveys a message much bigger than himself. Aleksandrov takes time to underline his nature in various scenes[337] where he yells at Dixon, beats her and spouts racial hate. Because of this, von Kneishitz is easy to interpret as a classical, even cliched Soviet villain. He, like for instance Dovzhenko's Shabanov in *Aerograd* and Eisenstein's Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order in *Alexander Nevsky*, is irredeemably evil with no qualities that could make him a likeable or sympathetic character. While he can be charming when needed, Alexandrov always makes it clear after these scenes that this is just a facade.

Compared to the oblivious and capricious Yelena, or even Aleksandrov's next villain, the bumbling fool bureaucrat Byvalov of *Volga-Volga*, it strongly seems that, despite of appearing in a comedy, he is not even meant to be laughed at but to be despised. Prokhorov has offered a good explanation for this paradox by observing how Aleksandrov uses the contrasting storytelling styles of comedy and melodrama in *Circus*. The fun and comic parts are reserved for the good characters, whereas the melodramatic parts belong to the capitalistic enemy, the "other". In the end, the optimistic and cheerful comedy triumphs in the ideological war between the two.[338] The choice is indeed likely intentional, and von Kneishitz is a definite factor in making *Circus* a much more serious film than its predecessor or successor. The whole film, perhaps due to the otherwise also dark time in the decade, demanded a different kind of antagonist, and von Kneishitz is based on that demand.

From the era's historical point of view, von Kneishitz is a very telling character because he is Aleksandrov's only foreign antagonist. Yelena represented a culture that was supposed to be disappearing from the society. The villains of the latter two films, on the other hand, were domestic enemies. But von Kneishitz brings to the silver screen a message of the outside world. He embodies the racism and the hate that the film is criticizing. His nationality also reflects the change happening

337 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:17:37 – 00:18:23 ; 00:35:38 – 00:38:17 & 01:18:13 – 01:19:38.
338 Prokhorov, 2007, 3.

in the country's foreign policies and the enemy increasingly being Germany instead of France and Britain. Such tradition of representing whole hostile countries through single characters was continued two years later in much stronger fashion by Eisenstein in *Alexander Nevsky*, a thinly veiled allegory of its era, where the medieval Russians repelled the attack of the Teutonic Knights and saved their lands. On the other hand, Aleksandrov differs from his colleagues in that he gives von Kneishitz a clear name. Dovzhenko's Japanese enemies in *Aerograd* were simply "two samurais", whereas Eisenstein called his villain "The Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order". This might be due to genre conventions: to have his romance plot play out right in the film, Aleksandrov needed a more personal enemy to act as the lovers' obstacle, whereas the two aforementioned films are more action oriented and the personality of the enemy is secondary. Then again, Aleksandrov was not beyond the Soviet convention of conveying a message with nameless characters, such as the band in *Happy Guys*.

Plenty of other observations could be made of von Kneishitz from the perspective of the Soviet art and politics. But he also, intentionally or not, has a very famous and ancient counterpart in the pre-revolutionary culture. Von Kneishitz resembles the Devil in several ways. In the traditional folklore there are two types of devils. The first type are omnipresent, small, and devious changelings, who represented different temptations. The people would defend themselves against these beings by using different charms or incantations, and by being "righteous".[339] The other type of devil is a larger, "abstractly ominous black body", but not a humanized being like in the Western tradition.[340] von Kneishitz resembles strictly neither of these, but instead the most famous of the devils and also the most contradictory in the Soviet sense: the Biblical one.

Like the Biblical devil, and the little Russian changelings too, von Kneishitz is often seen trying to tempt the heroes of *Circus* and to make them fall for something in order to advance his own agenda. There are three such attempts, two successful and one failed. All of them also represent rather Biblical vices. The first one, gluttony, is aimed at the director's daughter, Raechka. The scene[341] takes place in a restaurant, where von Kneishitz is at first dancing with her and then leads her to a table full of delicacies. Raechka at first refuses to eat, explaining that she is performing with Martynov and if she gains even a little weight, the performance might be ruined. She even acknowledges that in the worst case Martynov could die. But von Kneishitz tempts her, assuring that it makes no difference. Raechka does not need more encouragement than that and is at the end

339 Emerson, 2008, 35.
340 Ibid.
341 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:27:04 – 00:28:59.

of the scene seen eating a cake. This falling for the sin has its consequences soon. In the scene[342] where the Soviet circus crew tries their own cannon performance for the first time, they fail and Martynov crashes to the ground. The director is then forced to turn back to von Kneishitz so that he and Dixon will continue performing in Circus. Raechka is seen running away from the scene as she realizes what happened.

The second temptation, cheating and lustfulness, is aimed at Raechka's somewhat simpleminded lover, Skameikin. This scene[343] takes place after the preceding scene where Dixon has written a letter to Martynov, telling she loves him, and left it in his room. However, von Kneishitz has managed to acquire the letter. Because Dixon did not address it directly to Martynov, von Kneishitz fools Skameikin by giving it to him, making Skameikin think Dixon loves him instead. Skameikin's vice is underlined before this by showing him giving flying kisses to Circus' female performers. Von Kneishitz then finds him and gives him the letter. Skameikin, after reading the letter, is thrilled and apparently quickly forgets his love for Raechka. Or perhaps he sees it as a way of taking a little revenge on her: Raechka, after all, has lately been closely associating with Martynov due to their performance, and the sin of envy would not likely be beyond a character like Skameikin. He rushes to the meeting place Dixon had indicated for Martynov. But instead of Dixon, he meets Raechka there. Mistaking her for Dixon at first, he makes Raechka furious. The director's daughter reads Dixon's letter and misunderstands it the same way as Skameikin did. This sparks a real drama later in the film, when this misunderstanding is then conveyed to Martynov, who in turn is disappointed in Dixon and makes this feelings clearly known to her. Von Kneishitz's temptation therefore is a success that even his actual Biblical counterpart might have been proud of.

The third attempt at tempting, this time with wealth and greed, is aimed at Dixon. Contrary to the previous ones, this time von Kneishitz actually fails. This scene[344] was briefly described in the subchapter discussing Dixon. After a failed attempt to persuade Dixon into leaving Moscow with him, von Kneishitz becomes furious. In a fit of rage he throws all kinds of expensive clothes at Dixon. This lucre, however, does not sway Dixon at all. If von Kneishitz is the devil in this story, then Dixon's stoic approach here can be argued to be almost saintly. The scene parallels the Biblical story of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Conveniently this story too has the devil tempt Jesus with wealth if only he will bow down to the devil. Dixon's reaction to Aleksandrov's devil in the film is not much different from Jesus calmly enduring the temptation and telling his

342 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:32:20 – 00:34:31.
343 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:45:13 – 00:48:24.
344 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:35:38 – 00:37:30.

Biblical tormentor: "Away from me, Satan".[345]

The difference between these episodes of temptation functions for contrasting the heroine with the ordinary people. Raechka and Skameikin both fall for von Kneishitz easily, but Dixon, the ideal new woman at this point of the story, knows better and is above such attempts. Dixon's reaction to von Kneishitz attempt is a reminder of the Russian folk belief that the way of fighting the devil, in addition to using charms, was being righteous. This was more about attitude than any single deed, and was often based on Christianity.[346] Thus the devil, in the end, is in the story in order to help creating a new Soviet saint. One which the audiences, made of ordinary Raechkas and Skameikins, were supposed to emulate and become like, much like the saints in the medieval Russia were religious models for the ordinary people.

Von Kneishitz's temptations also serve as a political lesson about the devious enemy who might appear charming and thus "wear a mask", to paraphrase the common Soviet concept of the era, but who in the end is evil and only out for destroying the Soviet happiness. In this way he is again a very cliched Soviet enemy, but it is rather interesting to notice how much Aleksandrov has made him resemble a Biblical character in order to convey this otherwise common Soviet message. A spy, a wrecker (like the one he used in *The Radiant Path* later), or even a bureaucrat like Byvalov from his *Volga-Volga* would have been much easier and common way of conveying the same message instead of using the banned religion. Then again, if we recall that even the early revolutionary Bolshevik heroes had much in common with the ancient saints, this seems more plausible: if the end result is essentially the same, why change the old, familiar narrative and not simply make a new version of it instead?

A less important, but nevertheless folkloric aspect of von Kneishitz is his cannon. As was established earlier, it was common in an especially archaic wonder tale for the villain to have supernatural control over the nature, such as controlling the wind or water. However, it was also observed that the Soviet folklore modernized the old folk tales. Thus the hero would, for example, fly using an aeroplane instead of a wooden eagle. Here Aleksandrov is doing essentially the same to the archaic villain. Von Kneishitz does not control the nature because that would be impossible for a mere human being like him, but he does instead control something very relevant to the Soviet society at the time: modern technology.

345 Russian Synodal Bible, Matthew 4:1–10.
346 Emerson, 2008, 35.

On the one hand, this is a reflection of the Soviet aspirations of first catching and then surpassing the West in technology. The Soviet performance in the film is not supposed to be only similar, but even better than von Kneishitz's. On the other hand, this does not exclude the explanation of von Kneishitz as a modern archaic wonder tale enemy in this regard. The wonder tale's enemy is wondrous and powerful precisely because of his supernatural control over the nature. Von Kneishitz, on the other hand, would be nothing without his cannon, a technological wonder of its time, at least seeing that the Soviet circus does not have anything to match it. It is made clear several times that the circus' director does not want to continue working with him.[347] This problem is solved not by literal magic this time, but by coming up with new, similar wondrous technology as his. Thus von Kneishitz is ultimately defanged.

All in all it can be said that von Kneishitz is a far more multifaceted enemy than Yelena ever was. As such, he first and foremost resembles a Soviet enemy. But as has been observed in this part of the analysis, the Soviet enemy could well be depicted like the enemies in the pre-revolutionary culture, and he was still a very efficient and evil antagonist. Whether Aleksandrov did this on purpose or not is again impossible to answer, but the decision itself is not completely illogical. The pre-revolutionary culture had very effective enemies that fit the Soviet mold: why would he have not utilized them to teach his lesson to the people who most likely knew these enemies already?

5.5 Moral of the Story

To call *Circus* the most ideological of Aleksandrov's four films studied in this thesis is not an exaggeration. Whereas *Happy Guys* was lacking ideology, *Circus* is packed full of it. Holmgren's hypothesis of Aleksandrov wanting to justify his own work seems like a plausible explanation for this change. The more common explanation would be the change of climate in the society he was working in. Not only had the Socialist Realism time to establish its authority in the country's art scene, but the times themselves had become darker since *Happy Guys*.

From the Soviet point of view the moral of the story is clear and repeated often. It is difficult to summarize it in one sentence, because Aleksandrov uses many different facets of the same message to make his point, but it could best be described as the praise of the new, utopian society and its people. By contrasting the foreign countries as the representatives of the old societies through von Kneishitz and depicting Martynov and Dixon as Soviet heroes, Aleksandrov is creating a black and

347 Aleksandrov, 1970, 00:28:58 – 00:29:57 & 00:30:19 – 00:31:24.

white situation where there are no shades of gray.

All of these three analyzed main characters are textbook examples of the Soviet policies and the Socialist Realism, but all of them still have their counterparts in the pre-revolutionary folk culture. The film's serious tone only changes these counterparts. The fool has become a *bogatyr* and a helper, whereas the relatively harmless bourgeois enemy has become the Biblical devil himself. The heroine still undergoes a change, but this time it is not for poetic justice and the audience's good feeling, but for a more ideological reason. From the folklore's view she transforms from an ordinary person into a hero and from the Soviet view the change is from an old person into a new person. In Aleksandrov's depiction the concepts are interchangeable because he uses the same motifs and solutions as his storytelling peasant predecessors did.

It is interesting how Aleksandrov's use of Kostya the Fool could still plausibly been an intentional choice appealing to folk tales, but in *Circus* such intention seems much more unlikely as the primary choice for telling the story. *Circus* fulfills the demands of the Socialist Realism and the Soviet authorities so well that it simply does not *need* another explanation. Yet there is one offered in this chapter. The parallels between the archetypes of the Soviet art in the film on the one hand, and the elements folklore on the other, is the most crucial piece of information gathered from *Circus*. Aleksandrov's most ideologically pure film praising the new society also parallels the stories told in the old society. Why is that? Perhaps because, as Sinyavsky observed on wonder tales, the wonder tales also liked to depict utopian societies that took the audience momentarily away from their ordinary surroundings and lives. Aleksandrov's only new invention here, in accordance to the Socialist Realism, was to insist that this Utopia was, or at least would soon be, reality.

The answer might also lie in Gorky's assumption that the best character archetypes already existed in the folklore. As has been asked already in this chapter, if a certain story element works, then why should it be changed completely instead of simply adapting it to convey the new message? Appealing to Gorky, however, loses some of its credibility in von Kneishitz, and especially the saintly qualities of Dixon and Martynov as new men. It seems very unlikely that Aleksandrov would have taken his archetypes from religion directly. A more likely explanation is that the archetypes of the Socialist Realism partly still coincided with the religious archetypes, just as the early revolutionary heroes had resembled the ancient saints. If anything, *Circus* implies a continuum between the pre- and post-revolutionary cultures and adaptation of the former to serve the latter, instead of completely abandoning the old world in favor of the new one.

Circus as Aleksandrov's most ideological film is a very telling piece of evidence in answering the thesis' question, but it is still not enough. By now we have studied two films that have ideologically been opposites to each other, but chronologically they are only two years apart. What if neither of them really reflects Aleksandrov's way to tell a story? What if *Circus,* which after all still was one of the first films Aleksandrov directed, is just as experimental as its predecessor, but only in a different way? What if the society in 1936 still had not quite established its nature and thus the films had to find their inspirations from somewhere else? These questions justify the study of the last two films of the quartet as well. As it turns out, Aleksandrov's remaining films are something in between his first two, but studying them from the folk culture's perspective still yields interesting results.

6. *Volga-Volga*

Aleksandrov's third musical comedy *Volga-Volga* had its screenplay accepted by Mosfilm in April 1937 and came out a year later in April 1938.[348] Whereas *Circus* took a step away from *Happy Guys*, this film resembled more Aleksandrov's first film. While Stalin had liked *Circus*, he specifically wanted a film that would resemble Aleksandrov's first comedy.[349] Such cheerful film, contrasting *Circus*' melodrama, might lead to assumption that life really was getting better in Soviet Union again. This, however, was not true, and the year 1938 resembled more the year 1936 than 1934. The purges started in 1936 were still going on and show trials were held until March 1938.[350] The progress achieved in the five year plans between the years 1934 and 1936 came to a halt in 1937.[351] The changes in international relations made the threat of war more realistic, and the hard winter caused a fuel shortage in the country.[352] In short, people still needed their utopian fairy tales to momentarily escape the reality, and the state might have needed them even more to conceal the reality. Aleksandrov's cheerful and optimistic films, depicting the reality not as it was but as it should and would soon be, were still popular among the authorities and the audiences for a reason.

But *Volga-Volga* had another purpose too. Out of all of Aleksandrov's films, it is the one most clearly praising the traditional folk tradition and peasants' way of life. If *Circus* had a serious social message, praising the new, utopian society and its people, *Volga-Volga* goes back to showing the cheerful life of the countryside filled with songs and smiling, energetic people. The reason for this

348 Salys, 2009, 226 & 243.
349 Salys, 2009, 204.
350 Ward, 1993, 118.
351 Ward, 1993, 84.
352 Ibid.

sudden praise of the folk ways was a shift in the official policies. The communal spirit of the small villages, which was first destroyed in the collectivization drive, was now to be revived: the national sentiment of the 1930s demanded that the Russian history, and so also its rural past, would be brought back to life instead of forgotten.[353] The Russian history was used otherwise in the country too with the most notable example being Stalin wanting to justify himself by canonizing Tsar Ivan the Terrible as his predecessor.[354] Aleksandrov's film was part of this same continuum.

The revival of countryside included it in "us" whereas still in the 1920s (and to certain extent already in the history of pre-revolutionary Russia) it had still been firmly part of "them".[355] It could be argued that this tradition still continued in the 1930s and was especially evident in the collectivization campaign where the cities dictated what was to happen to the countryside and workers from cities were sent to the countryside to lead this change. Now, however, the "them" was increasingly the hostile powers behind the Soviet Union's borders, as was already seen in *Circus* through von Kneishitz. Bringing the remote countryside into being part of "us" was therefore important for the attempt of unifying the country and preventing separatism.

Having established *Volga-Volga* as a film praising the folk culture, it should be particularly interesting for a thesis studying the folk culture influences in the films. If the previous two films have already had many of them, then what else could a film openly embracing this culture be? However, it is not as simple as to state that *Volga-Volga* uses folk culture influences and there is nothing more to say about it. Seeing that there were two kinds of it in the Soviet Union, the actual pre-revolutionary folk culture and the special Soviet folk culture, it seems plausible that when Aleksandrov wanted to film a movie that honors the folk arts, he would have referred to the latter instead of the former. After all, the Soviet folk culture by 1938 had had plenty of time to establish itself. But like Aleksandrov's previous films, *Volga*-Volga still had influences from elsewhere too. The American musicals and Disney films were still effecting it in the background.[356] It also has strong resemblance to a French film *La Marseillaise* (also premiered in 1938).[357] It is therefore not impossible to assume that the pre-revolutionary culture, intentionally or not, could still have its place in his third film.

353 Salys, 2009, 205.
354 Kozlov, 1993, 112.
355 Salys, 2009, 208.
356 Salys, 2009, 256 – 257.
357 Clark, 2011b, 186.

6.1 The Film as a Story

Much like *Happy Guys* and the quartet's last film, *The Radiant Path*, *Volga-Volga* also starts from the idyllic Soviet countryside. The film's heroine, a letter carrier commonly referred to with her nickname Strelka[358], arrives by ferry to a small village and her home, Melkovodsk. She is carrying a telegram to a local bureaucrat, the film's antagonist Byvalov. Together with her on the ferry is the film's male protagonist, Alyosha Trubyshkin, an accountant and a conductor of a classical orchestra. The two are in love in the beginning of the film but have obvious ideological differences. Strelka is a fan of folk music and secretly a composer herself. She has composed and written the film's theme song, *Song of the Volga*, but claims that it was her friend Dunya (not an actual character in the film) who did it. She thinks the classical music is boring, whereas Alyosha looks down on the folk arts and amateur artists. Throughout the film the two protagonists argue, make up, and end up arguing again later.

The plot twists as the ferry gets stuck in the middle of the river and Byvalov has to ride to the banks of the river personally to receive Strelka's telegram. Nevertheless, he is thrilled to hear that there is a telegram waiting for him. He is bitter for being stuck working in a frontier area and believes that he will soon be called to Moscow, where he yearns to move. But when Byvalov arrives, he learns that the telegram is not about moving him to Moscow at all. Instead it is an invitation for him to assemble an amateur group of artists from his area and take part in an *olympiad*[359]. Byvalov refuses, stating that the village does not have any real talents to send to the competition. Strelka is offended by this and tries to convince him on the contrary by conspiring with the whole village to show him what they can do. Trubyshkin, on the other hand, wishes to convince the bureaucrat and upstage Strelka by showing him that classical music is superior to the folk arts.

Byvalov realizes that with an orchestra he would get to go to Moscow and improve his own standing in the eyes of the authorities. He agrees to make Trubyshkin and his orchestra his official participants in the *olympiad* and they take the only ship in the village to sail to Moscow. But Strelka's friend knows that there is another ship in another village that they could take and sail to Moscow themselves. This starts a race between the two teams, and most of the film focuses on following its events. During these events, through few strokes of fate, Alyosha ends up in Strelka's ship, whereas Strelka ends up in his ship. As Strelka accepts to lead Trubyshkin's classical orchestra, and Trubyshkin starts conducting for her folk band, a consensus is found: both bands

358 "Arrow" in Russian.
359 A state sponsored competition of amateur musicians, especially in folk music. LaPasha, 2004, 123.

agree that they should join together and perform *Song of the Volga* at the *olympiad*.

However, the fate interrupts their plans again. When the classical orchestra starts writing down the song's notes on pages taken from Byvalov's notebook, a storm sinks their ship and the notes are carried by the wind and the river to people all along Volga's banks. When the two teams finally arrive to Moscow, sure that their song is going to win the competition, they find out that all the other competitors have also learned the song and are performing it. Byvalov is mistaken for the song's composer, as the pages from his notebook had his name printed on them. But when Byvalov is asked to perform the song, he has to admit that he does not know how to play, sing, or even read the notes. When the composer is then looked for again, Strelka still insists that it was "Dunya" who composed it but finally admits that she herself is responsible for the song. Once the author of the song is finally revealed, Trubyshkin and Strelka make up for one last time and the song is performed to the *olympiad*'s audience. Byvalov still tries to get part of the fame by joining the chorus but his voice fails him and he is forced to quietly leave while everyone is laughing at him.

As a Soviet film, *Volga-Volga* is an allegory. As Turovskaya has observed, the transition in the film from a backwater village of Melkovodsk and the heroes' primitive boat to Moscow and more modern ships represents the change of whole country from backwardness to industrialization.[360] While in every film of Aleksandrov's quartet the protagonists sooner or later ends up in Moscow, in *Volga-Volga* traveling there has intrinsic value and the film focuses on the journey. Such journey was not uncommon in the era's culture otherwise either. The characters in literature journeyed from the periphery to center often too, and this symbolized the very same thing.[361] The character's origins in the countryside, on the other hand, acted as a link between the city and the countryside, and he or she achieving greater consciousness in the capital symbolized the whole country's journey towards socialism.[362] This is a very Soviet feature of the stories, as the peasant tales took place in "Another kingdom" and did therefore not feature Moscow. But according to Sokolov, such journey does still have its roots in the folklore. A common reason for a tale's hero to leave on a journey was to find the truth: in a Soviet tale of the 1930s the truth was still being sought, only this time it was found in Moscow in the tale's end, usually by meeting Stalin and discussing matters with him.[363] This is another example of an old folk tale motif being simply modernized, as was common.

360 Turovskaya, 1998. Online article without page numbers.
361 Clark, 2011b, 119.
362 Clark, 2011b, 123.
363 Sokolov, 2012, 664.

As far as folkloric elements otherwise go in the film, Salys has noted that *Volga-Volga*'s plot follows the Russian wonder tale genre well. She has detailed in steps how each major part of the film correlates with Propp's framework for a wonder tale's plot and characters.[364] While this is a subject open for interpretations, Salys' interpretation is a plausible one. It is made more plausible by the fact that, unlike its predecessor, *Volga-Volga* lacks a definitive socialist plot as described by Clark and Kenez. This is not to say that it would not have elements of socialist art and Soviet film: of course it does. But whereas *Circus* was a didactic film depicting the protagonist growing into a new man and gaining understanding, which was even stressed in the film's last line of dialogue, *Volga-Volga* is, in fact, much more akin to *Happy Guys* in that it is first and foremost an amusing film. Its characters, according to Salys, also fit the paradigms of a wonder tale precisely because they do not have any special, psychological character development in the film.[365] It could be argued that the majority of characters in *Circus* do not have any major character development either, but the following and stressing of Dixon's growth invalidates this argument, because similar motif is not used neither in *Happy Guys* or *Volga-Volga*.

Considering the film's background, the use of the wonder tale's plot paradigm in *Volga-Volga* may even be an intentional choice by Aleksandrov. While Sokolov claims that the wonder tales in Soviet era were going out of favor and replaced by tales of everyday life, this is still not to say that Soviet wonder tales did not exist or that Aleksandrov could not have been familiar with their traditional structure.[366] However, the use of the paradigm is not Aleksandrov's only way to celebrate the folk culture in his third film. Among other things, the characters in *Volga-Volga* also intentionally utilize gestures that were considered stereotypical for peasants, such as blowing nose to one's sleeve.[367] Using such stereotypes, while likely not done with a malevolent intent, is a rather telling sign of the Soviet film culture in general. It is essentially the director telling people on the countryside how they are in a film about them. Considering the hierarchy between the cities and the countryside in the 1930s Soviet Union, this does not seem unusual, no matter how much the authorities wanted now to make the countryside part of "us". The film as a medium was still part of the official culture and a way for the authorities to convey their views of the world, not necessarily the realities of the countryside and its people.

364 Salys, 2009, 249.
365 Ibid.
366 Sokolov, 2012, 662. While Sokolov's claim might be true, it is questionable what for him, as a writer in the 1930s, was a wondrous tale and what was considered realistic. Was a propaganda tale about the life in countryside, for instance, wondrous or not? Whether Sokolov himself believed in propaganda or not is irrelevant because pressure from the outside might have still led him to write in a certain way.
367 Salys, 2009, 246.

For a modern wonder tale the film's plot is rather down to earth in its nature. Because of the lack of a socialist plot, it also lacks a distinctive Soviet miracle. It could be argued that in *Volga-Volga* the miracle has already happened, whereas in *Circus* it happened in the film and in *Happy Guys* it did not happen at all but was a different, more traditional miracle instead in that film. This might be because *Volga-Volga*, according to Aleksandrov too, has a rather patriotic message.[368] It was meant for showing the audiences what their homeland was like. Volga was supposed to act as a metaphor that would, as a river flowing through the country, unite the periphery and the center, thus removing the old confrontation between the two and creating an unified country in its place. When people could not travel as easily as today to see the country's different parts personally, there was a need for such film.

With such purpose concentrating on characters and their growth may as well be secondary. The *characters* of *Volga-Volga* do resemble their ancient wonder tale counterparts in that they are stereotypes serving the story's purpose, whereas their changing and growing had been more central to the first two films, although in different ways. The film's *plot*, however, deviates from the wonder tales in this sense (there is no protagonist becoming a hero) while it otherwise follows the usual framework well.

Volga-Volga also does not utilize many folkloric story elements, such as symbolic animals or mythical objects like mirror.[369] This is strange from a director who has so far used them in his first two comedies, and especially in a film that was supposed to praise the folk culture. However, it might be precisely due to the praising of folk culture that Aleksandrov abandoned these elements. He had plenty of material to work with already. The film depicts life in countryside, the carnivalistic traditions, well known folk songs, the occupations of the countryside people, and much more. When Aleksandrov had all that, implementing subtle references like the ones mentioned may not have been worth it. But it also brings up the question of which folk culture *Volga-Volga* specifically tries to convey. If *Volga-Volga* is a film celebrating the folk culture and its plot fits Propp's framework to a certain extent, then how do its characters fit the traditional wonder tale paradigms other than being rather one-dimensional?

368 Salys, 2009, 208.

369 Salys (2009, 245 – 245) says the film's antagonist Byvalov is made to resemble a pig, but the use of symbolic animals is nevertheless much more subtle than it was in *Happy Guys*.

6.2 Strelka: the New Heroine.

The film's most apparent protagonist is Strelka the letter carrier, again played by Lyubov Orlova. Aleksandrov had tested a female protagonist in *Circus*, but Dixon still was very much dependent on Martynov, and thus the male and the female protagonist were equally important for the plot. While Dixon received much attention in the film, her dependence on the others still caused her to be a character who simply let events unfold around her, a proverbial damsel in distress waiting to be saved by the hero. Strelka, on the other hand, is clearly a heroine from the beginning of the film and is not dependent on anyone. Unlike Dixon, she has a clear motive from the beginning of the film: to go to Moscow and to prove that the people of her village are talented. She also does not change at any point of the film like Dixon did, but instead represents the era's ideals from the beginning to the end. It is no wonder that when Enzenberger chose a picture for her article's caption depicting "[...] archetypal *feminina sovietica* [...]", she used Orlova's character from Volga-Volga.[370]

Aleksandrov's use of such strong female protagonist, and especially in this film, is a curious choice. The female protagonists themselves were rare and if they were protagonists, they were more often than not modest and sensitive characters, resembling a Cinderella-type of personality. Yet, in his film glorifying the folk culture, Aleksandrov has chosen to break this tradition and create a strong, female protagonist. But this is not a new choice only from the folk culture's perspective. From the earlier film culture in Russia, a more familiar female protagonist for the audiences would have been the classic pre-revolutionary Russia's woman whose main purpose was to be seduced by a man.[371] Thus the woman in these films was still rather weak, and an object for the plot like she had been in the usual peasant tales as well. Strelka fits neither of these molds and while she has romantic interest in the film, she can hardly be described first and foremost through her relationship to the film's male protagonist Alyosha.

It seems that Strelka instead resembles the most the ideal woman of the 1920s as described by Evans Clements.[372] But this woman, based at first on the female volunteers in the Civil War, was not the reality of the 1930s. As Taylor observes, the women of the 1930s lived a life between the home and the work place and were therefore more family and home oriented.[373] Strelka, on the other hand, is never seen doing anything even remotely resembling such and thus contrasts the reality. She represents a different and, some might say, more desirable reality for the women, as Taylor also

370 Enzenberger, 1993, 107.
371 Piispa, 2009, 29.
372 Evans Clements, 1985, 220 – 221.
373 Taylor, 2011, 205.

adds that such unrealistic depiction of the heroine "must have represented truly utopian wish fulfillment".[374]The domestic tendencies of the women in reality are further supported by Fitzpatrick, according to whom the wives of the leaders (who would therefore likely be considered "models" like their husbands) were mostly housewives, tasked to make their home a cultured place where the husband would then rest after coming home from his work.[375] It can be theorized based on this that a housewife was the ideal woman in this era, and the fact that many women also worked was due to the women of the poorer classes having to work in order to provide for their families. The wives of the leaders, on the other hand, could afford to be housewives. If the ideal woman was truly a working one, then it would not have made sense for a prominent man in the society to have a wife who would not have lived up to this ideal.

While Dixon grew up in her film to become a heroine, she was also a mother who supposedly ended up marrying Martynov and forming a family with him. Anyuta of *Happy Guys* was a simple maid, often depicted in domestic work. But Strelka takes the ideal of gender equality proposed in *Circus* a step further by abandoning such traditional female roles in favor of a more independent and masculine role. This is also reflected to her appearance, as she is very rarely seen wearing a woman's clothes like Anyuta and Dixon were, but instead usually has an unisex uniform of a mail carrier.[376] As a strong and masculine character, Strelka also does not show weakness as easily as her predecessors did. She is seen crying once near the end of the film.[377] There is a sense of shame attached to it, again unlike in the previous films, seeing that she first pulls down her window's curtains so that no one can see her. Curiously she also wears very feminine clothing in this scene, further separating her momentarily from the Strelka that the audience knows at this part of the film. But this brief deviation does not change her character, because it has already by this point of the film been established to be something completely different. Crying was much more natural for Anyuta and Dixon and happened to them in the earlier parts of their films. For Strelka it simply gives another minor aspect, making her more humane and stressing the difficulty of the situation.

With such role and character, Strelka is out of all of Aleksandrov's characters one of the most distinctive heralds of the new world and the new man. She takes a definite step away from both her own era's reality as well as the reality as depicted by the pre-revolutionary tales. In this case the two realities coincided, whereas Strelka exists to offer an alternative, new reality which was going to be

374 Ibid.
375 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 82.
376 Salys, 2009, 246.
377 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:23:23 – 01:24:17.

prevalent in the future society. Her tale, unlike the old folk tales, does not uphold social values in this regard but breaks them. Sinyavsky was cited earlier observing that sometimes the folk tales also broke the social values, such as having a peasant become a Tsar, but in the end they still upheld them because there was still only one Tsar to rule the peasants at the end of the tale. Strelka makes no such concessions and does not permanently return to the more familiar role of a woman of her time at any point of the film.

Nevertheless, Strelka does have her folkloric moments in the film. One of the more prominent ones[378] comes early in the film when Strelka tries to convince Byvalov that they have talented people living in Melkovodsk. Strelka recites poetry and dances to him, but all in vain. Byvalov does not understand or recognize these performances. He is also very skeptical towards anyone's singing talents, claiming that to sing well one would have to study for twenty years first. This scene turns the tables on the real life when Strelka, a peasant with supposedly not much education proves to be more knowledgeable and cultured than her opposite, the bureaucrat Byvalov who as an official would likely have at least some education. Byvalov's penchant for education is also made clear by his own dialogue. Such turning of the tables was a common motif in the peasants' tales of everyday life where the seemingly less educated character (always a peasant) outsmarted a seemingly more intelligent character (an aristocrat, a merchant or a priest).[379] But here one can ask: is this truly folkloric for Strelka? Until now, when Aleksandrov's characters have resembled something from the pre-revolutionary past, there has been quite a lot of evidence in each of them to support a certain character archetype from the folklore. Strelka, however, fits the folklore's mold poorly and is more a Soviet heroine.

The concept of making an intelligent person look stupid, on the other hand, is a rather simple motif which appeals to the audience's sense of poetic justice. Even the Bible has a similar theme with the order in the Kingdom of Heaven being that the first become last and the last become first. Can the use of such simple motif be truly considered a remnant of the folklore, or simply an easy way to make people laugh? While the film in general portrays peasants as intelligent and capable people while making fun of a state's bureaucrat, this theme is still not extended much further with Strelka and can not therefore be considered a part of her character. Therefore it might be rather called as implied earlier: a folkloric moment, not a folkloric feature.

378 Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:22:30 – 00:26:04.
379 Sokolov, 2012, 471.

Strelka is again associated with the folk culture shortly later in a long scene[380] where she and the people of Melkovodsk together try to convince Byvalov of their talents. This scene includes folk songs that are still today well known (such as *Iz-za ostrova na strezhen'* and *Ey, ukhnem!*[381]) as well as more carnivalistic traditions, such as acrobatics and men walking on stilts. In the middle of all this is Strelka, the energetic coordinator of the whole elaborate show. She is associated with folk culture, but the question remains: is she herself a folkloric character? The answer to this question in this scene's case too is that she is not. Strelka herself is not seen performing any of these folk performances in the scene. She is only associated with the people who perform them. She actually even says to Byvalov in one scene[382] of the film that what she herself can do is "not important", further underlining this point.

Instead, Strelka is an agitator. She herself does not perform the traditional folk arts in the film, but she knows how to inspire the people of Melkovodsk to band together for a common cause against Byvalov. In this role, and otherwise too, Strelka is portrayed as very energetic and optimistic, always finding ways to overcome the problems. As an essentially new woman it is no wonder that she is depicted with such virtues, much like Martynov in *Circus* had many features of the ideal new man. Another virtue she often demonstrates is bravery. This is most evident in the scene[383] where the steamer is ready to leave from Melkovodsk to Moscow. Byvalov demands to know who she is, to which Strelka proudly answers by standing up straight, telling her name and her profession as a mail carrier. She is immediately contrasted after this with a nameless male chef from whom Byvalov asks the same question. The chef, a small and thin man with very soft voice, is barely able to answer and hides under staircase when Byvalov tells him to get out. Strelka demonstrates the story's virtues much like her predecessors in folk tales, but to have a new woman express virtues in a didactic Soviet film is not surprising per se and not likely connected to the folk tradition. If it was, then Strelka should resemble a traditional heroine in other ways too, but she does not.

Strelka's nature as an agitator plays a role again when she somehow manages to off screen convince even Trubyshkin's classical orchestra to abandon their music in favor of her own song, *Song of the Volga*, seeing that they are rehearsing it together after she and Trubyshkin accidentally swap ships.[384] This makes her all the more Soviet rather than folkloric hero, however, because *Song of the Volga*, like *Song of the Motherland*, is a very contemporary and patriotic song with very little to

380 Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:26:51 – 00:33:05.
381 See list of electronic sources for a link to performance and lyrics.
382 Aleksandrov, 1938, 0025:24 – 00:25:42.
383 Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:39:20 – 00:40:04
384 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:07:47 – 01:09:05.

do with the pre-revolutionary past. While songs about Volga were part of the Russian traditional culture, here the river Volga is a metaphor of the Soviet Union, and rather thinly veiled too as is seen from the song's short but often repeated refrain:

Красавица народная,	National[385] beauty,
Как море, полноводная,	Plentiful like a sea,
Как Родина, свободная,	Free like the motherland,
Широка,	Wide,
Глубока,	Deep,
Сильна.	Strong.

As can be clearly seen from this short refrain, Strelka's song is repeating the same message as Martynov's song in *Circus*. Comparing Volga first to the motherland and then listing the adjectives leaves no doubt that the song is not referring only to the river. Thus Strelka's song definitely continues the pre-revolutionary tradition in writing another song about the Volga, but breaks the tradition in making this song firmly patriotic and subjugating the river for this message. In real pre-revolutionary folk songs about Volga, such as in the aforementioned *Iz-za ostrova na strezhen'* and *Ey, ukhnem*, the river was an independent subject. Since both of those songs are featured in the film, let us first compare how Volga is treated in *Ey, ukhnem*, which, not likely incidentally, also describes it with some of the same adjectives as Strelka's song.

Эх ты, Волга, мать-река,	Oh you, Volga, mother river,
Широка и глубока,	Wide and deep
Ай-да, да ай-да,	Ai-da, da ai-da,
Ай-да, да ай-да,	Ai-da, da ai-da,
Волга, Волга, мать-река	Volga, Volga, mother river.

Iz-za ostrova na strezhen' describes Volga as a mother too. Again the river itself is important here and not serving as symbol for something else.

Волга, Волга, мать родная,	Volga, Volga, dear mother,
Волга, русская река,	Volga, Russian river,

However, it should still be noted that that the difference between the old folk songs and Strelka's song is intentional and not hidden at all. The song's first verse makes this clear with its first two lines.

385 The adjective народная is somewhat difficult to translate with one word, but it refers here to something that belongs to the people and could be considered their ancient heritage or a part of their nature.

Много песен про Волгу пропето,	Many songs have been sung about Volga
Но ещё не сложили такой.	But one like this has not yet been made.

Later in the film the song's relation with the old folk songs about Volga is further elaborated by stating that in earlier songs "our sorrow" sang, whereas in the new song it is "our happiness" that sings.[386] Thus Strelka's song intentionally acknowledges the past but reflects a change in the tradition. Using such song as her theme, and indeed as the whole film's theme song, again reinforces her status as a Soviet heroine. The past's folk culture is paid a proper homage in the film's beginning when the people of Melkovodsk are trying to convince Byvalov but from there on it is the new tradition, new song and the new man (or woman) that take the leading role in the film.

This is not surprising because most of other characters in Aleksandrov's films have also been very much Soviet characters. What is surprising, however, is that Strelka, unlike so many other characters in Aleksandrov's films, does not seem to have even a coincidental counterpart in the past. While she is associated with the folk culture, she breaks the conventions of the actual pre-revolutionary folk culture so many times that it would be difficult to call her a folkloric character. The old man in the audience may have recognized some of her features, but her lesson and her methods for teaching it were anything but traditional.

6.3 Alyosha Trubyshkin: the Unheroic Man

The film's male lead, accountant and classical conductor Trubyshkin, is possibly the most curious one of all of Aleksandrov's male characters. This is because he does not outright fit either the Soviet nor the pre-revolutionary Russian tradition. Trubyshkin's most distinctive feature is his insistence on being a professional, classical musician and his resentment of folk arts.[387] Yet towards the end of the film he adopts Strelka's *Song of the Volga* together with his orchestra. From a Soviet film's point of view this could be seen as growing up. He abandons the foreign pre-revolutionary music of Beethoven and Schubert in favor of a contemporary Soviet song. This is not unlike Dixon abandoning her previous life abroad in favor of staying in Soviet Union with Martynov.

However, the growth explanation, while very fitting to the Socialist Realism, is not entirely satisfactory in Trubyshkin's case. While Dixon's growth was her character's and the whole film's central theme, Trubyshkin's growth simply happens. Strelka is not his mentor character like

386 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:32:28 – 01:32:56.
387 See for example Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:09:32 – 00:11:54 ; Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:38:46 – 00:39:20 & Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:41:54 – 00:44:50.

Martynov was Dixon's. On the contrary, whenever the two meet, they sooner or later end up arguing about their musical tastes. Of course, while it would be somewhat more unconventional, he could learn through arguing too, but this does not happen either. Instead, something simply happens off screen and suddenly Trubyshkin has understood how wonderful *Song of the Volga* is. This is not elaborated or explained in any way. But even more alarming is the fact that this change is not used for a didactic purpose in the film. Dixon's change happened so that *Circus* could give its audience a lesson. Trubyshkin's change simply happens. While the contrast between the classical and the folk tradition exists in the film, it is not nearly as central as the contrast between the foreign and the domestic in *Circus* was.

Then what if Trubyshkin is a new Yelena? He does indeed represent an old culture and he abandoning it could be seen as a message of the new world triumphing over the old one. But the problem with this explanation is that Yelena was made fun of. She was her film's primary antagonist and was therefore portrayed in a negative light. Trubyshkin, on the other hand, is not. The film's laughing stock's role is reserved for Byvalov, whereas Trubyshkin is ultimately a positive character and he cannot be a positive and a negative character at the same time. The antagonist of a 1930s Soviet film does not get redeemed and become a hero in the end, but exists only to be won by the positive characters. Often his or her fate is also more gruesome than what Aleksandrov's antagonists have to suffer in these comedies, and as such serves as a telltale sign of their propagandistic purposes. Trubyshkin is no antagonist and as such the culture he represents is not truly resented in the way it was in *Happy Guys*. Aleksandrov does poke some fun at the classical music again by having Trubyshkin act overly pedantic and pointing his orchestra's mistakes out with the help of an abacus, but this is hardly the same as devoting a whole long scene to Kostya unwittingly leading a concert.[388] While the former is making fun of the classical music's nature and perhaps even more of Trubyshkin's character[389], the latter had a clear social message. It can therefore be surmised that *Volga-Volga* targets completely other aspects of the Soviet society, as seen also in Byvalov's analysis below.

From the folklore's perspective Trubyshkin is even more difficult to approach. He is a man, yet he is not a hero. In the end he gets his bride and happy ending, but he does not achieve this by going on a journey, fighting the antagonist and saving the damsel in distress. Even Martynov was more a hero character than Trubyshkin because at least he helped Dixon to change and also stood up for her

388 Compare Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:55:06 – 00:58:00 and Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:42:12 – 00:42:49.

389 Salys (2009, 249 – 250) has suggested, quoting this feature, that Trubyshkin is a lesser version of Byvalov in the film.

against von Kneishitz. Trubyshkin is no fool either because, unlike Kostya, he is not inherently comical but a very serious character. But most dramatically he differs from both of those characters in that he is the one changing in the film in order to get his happy ending. The fact that he needs to prove himself to Strelka, and not the other way around, is not only breaking the conventions of the folklore, but it is extraordinary even in Aleksandrov's own film quartet. In *Happy Guys* Anyuta had to prove herself to Kostya, who was initially only interested in Yelena. In *Circus* Dixon had to change in order to free herself from von Kneishitz and be together with Martynov. Even in *The Radiant Path*, which also features a strong female protagonist, Tanya needs to become an engineer to be worth the film's male protagonist Lebedev. In *Volga-Volga*, on the other hand, Trubyshkin needs to first change before he can be together with the film's unchanging heroine Strelka.

One way to explain this change is to go outside of the film's world for a moment. Strelka's actor, Lyubov Orlova, was rising to become one of the Soviet film scene's most prominent stars in the 1930s, largely due to her roles in Aleksandrov's films. By 1938 she had definitely established her status as a film star and a Soviet celebrity with many fans who wanted to see her. The Soviet film culture was no exception to the birth of famous film stars, and there is no reason for why Turner's observation that "few, perhaps, went to see Marilyn Monroe movies, for her characterizations" could not be applied to Orlova as well.[390] There are several accounts of the appreciation and letters she received from her fans that support this. For instance, already when *Volga-Volga* was being planned and the public learned that Orlova was going to play a mail carrier in the next film, she received letters from real mail carriers who told her about their work and invited her to follow their daily routines.[391] With such fan base it is therefore no wonder that her roles in Aleksandrov's films also gradually expanded, whereas the role of the male protagonists diminished. Orlova's characters grew from the relatively unseen Anyuta to the changing heroine Dixon and finally the film's only true protagonist, Strelka of *Volga-Volga*. While Trubyshkin's actor, Andrei Tutyshkin, and Byvalov's actor, Igor Ilyinski, are also both familiar names from the Soviet film scene, they still hardly compare to Orlova, especially in the 1930s. Stalin, for example, knew Orlova personally but had no idea who Ilyinski was before his role in *Volga-Volga*.[392]

It can thus be deduced that Trubyshkin's major role is to emphasize Strelka's character. He is her polar opposite in every possible sense. Trubyshkin exists so that Strelka would have someone to be compared to and so that she could therefore convey her own message. Trubyshkin, however, is not a

390 Turner, 1999, 70.
391 Salys, 2009, 233.
392 Borev, 2008, 292 – 293.

villain, because the villains in Aleksandrov's films have their own messages to convey. Strelka and Trubyshkin essentially exist to deliver the film's positive message to the audiences and tell them how to be like. Their counterpart Byvalov, on the other hand, educates the viewers on what they should avoid and be aware of.

6.4 Byvalov: the Soviet *Boyar* and the Invisible Tsar

The film's antagonist, vaguely named "Citizen Byvalov"[393] in the credits, is unlike his two predecessors. Yelena and von Kneishitz both represented a clear, ideological enemy from the outside. In Yelena's case this was her bourgeois culture, whereas von Kneishitz was literally an outsider by being a foreigner. Byvalov, on the other hand, is an antagonist from the inside. He represents the official system and the Soviet authorities by being a state's bureaucrat. Making fun of the state's bureaucrat, as opposed to an ideological enemy, is still not an unusual or particularly bold choice for Aleksandrov. On the contrary, the lesser bureaucrats like Byvalov were valid targets for Soviet satire in the 1930s and featured for instance in the satirical magazine *Krokodil.*[394] This was a way to control the local power from the center by exposing and fighting against bureaucrats and accusing them of corruption.[395] In the end this came down to the shifting of responsibility, which was common in the era: if something was wrong in the country, it was not because of the high leadership had blundered, but because the people at the lower levels could not achieve the goals.[396] Thus Aleksandrov's use of bureaucrat Byvalov as his film's antagonist is perfectly in line with his society and era and not real criticism against the system.

Much like in Yelena's case, calling Byvalov an “antagonist” is a more appropriate term than “enemy”, because Byvalov is not evil or even particularly threatening. On the contrary, he is depicted as a bumbling fool who thinks too much of himself. Byvalov is rude, crudely put stupid, opportunistic and arrogant, but he is in the end a sympathetic character. He is an unpleasant person, but it would be beyond him to be seen doing something blatantly evil, such as beating a defenseless woman or making a child cry like von Kneishitz did. Yet, as a Soviet antagonist, Byvalov is not a person. This is evident already from not being truly named in the film. Salys has observed various aspects in him that are, it seems to me, meant for criticizing the targeted small time bureaucrats

393 His first name is in one scene (Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:25:06 – 01:26:20) revealed to be Ivan through a printed text in his notebook's page, but this is not used at any point of the film. He is referred to as "Byvalov", "Citizen" or most often as "Comrade Byvalov".
394 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 28 – 29.
395 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 165 – 166.
396 Lewin, 2005, 33 – 34.

instead of making him more despicable as a person. The first point is his name: it is derived from the adjective *бывалый* (byvalyi), which can mean "experienced", but in here stands for something that has been in the past. He is depicted as stuck in place, whereas his counterpart, the story's heroine, is named "arrow", suggesting movement.[397] He is as stiff as the bureaucratic system he represents: his body language is purposefully rigid.[398] His speech consists of cliches that are not appropriate for the situations, much like the speech of the stereotypical peasant turned official in the works of Soviet writers. And finally there is the aforementioned associating him with a symbolic animal, pig. While Byvalov is not as propagandistic as von Kneishitz, he is still definitely a Soviet antagonist with a clear message to convey to the audiences. This message is also repeated in plain Russian during the films ending scene[399], not unlike the director in *Circus* told Dixon what the moral of the story was.

However, Byvalov also has a more folkloric counterpart, one that tells something about the Russian mentality being transferred to the Soviet society and art. The Soviet authorities and satirists were not the first ones to despise the people representing the lower echelons of the state's power. A common enemy in peasant tales (though less so in wonder tales) was a *boyar*, a noble who stood in between the peasant and the good Tsar. Byvalov is nothing short of a modernized, Soviet *boyar*: an inefficient bureaucrat without whom everything would supposedly work better in the society.

In order to make Byvalov an antagonist that on the one hand represents the state and on the other hand still does not criticize it, Aleksandrov uses a simple strategy of contrasting the state and Byvalov as a person. This is evident especially early in the film. The peasants, represented by the people of Melkovodsk, are called to meet the proverbial Tsar by being invited to participate in an *olympiad* specifically in Moscow and not some other major city. However the *boyar* refuses at first to send anyone from the village to Moscow, and as a representative of the state's power in the remote village his word is the law. Thus the benevolent Tsar's caring for his peasants is ruined by an evil underling. While in the Soviet context this message is directed against the bureaucrats abusing their power in the countryside, the parallel with the folk culture is striking. Furthermore, while the *boyar* gets mocked throughout the film, no question of the Tsar's benevolence is ever raised during the film's events. Considering this parallel, the latter may not be only because of the censorship editing out any possible criticism against Stalin or the higher echelons of the Soviet power.

397 Salys, 2009, 250.
398 Salys, 2009, 250 – 251.
399 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:38:08 – 01:40:16.

The second time[400] comes as the orchestras are leaving from Melkovodsk to Moscow. Byvalov invites Trubyshkin's classical orchestra to his ship, but drives away Strelka's group, stating that the ship is meant only for artists. Strelka insists that her uncle Kuzya is an artist, but Byvalov dismisses her, stating Kuzya is no artist but a water carrier. When Strelka asks if a water carrier cannot be an artist, Byvalov laughs saying that perhaps somewhere else it is possible, but it is impossible for his water carrier to be one. With this statement he makes it clear that the Soviet state itself is not against people of humble origins being artists. On the contrary, the whole film is about encouraging such artists and their art. It is Byvalov personally who again ruins this opportunity that the state has tried to give to the peasants of Melkovodsk.

Byvalov and the state are contrasted for the third time later in the film, during the race on Volga. At one point of the story both of the ships get stuck on shoals. A tugboat comes to help them and frees Byvalov's ship first. A scene[401] follows where Byvalov and the tugboat's captain discuss what should be done with Strelka's ship. Byvalov states that it should not be helped because it is not in his system and thus not his responsibility. His ship's captain protests that Strelka's ship is still in the "Soviet system", but Byvalov dismisses him. It could also be argued that not only these single scenes, but the very plot of the film revolves around this theme of fighting against the modern *boyar*. The film's whole storyline is about the peasants cutting out the middleman and his classical orchestra and trying to reach Moscow (and therefore, in the end, the proverbial Tsar) first to directly show them what the peasant culture is truly like.

While the folkloric connotations in the previous two films may have plausibly been coincidental, here it is definitely no coincidence that Byvalov's role in the film resembles a *boyar* of the folk tales. It is rather an extension of Stalin's attempts to build a cult of personality in the 1930s. While Stalin may not have personally told Aleksandrov to direct the film this way, he was still himself very active in creating his public image instead of simply letting it happen.[402] But why did it succeed? Sinyavsky suggests that part of its success was due to people genuinely embracing the phenomenon, and the embracing was based on them missing having a Tsar.[403] This missing, on the other hand, had its roots in the Russian past, as the myth of a father-like Tsar existed already in the pre-revolutionary Russia.[404] Stalin exploited this myth in building his public image, and one way to

400 Aleksandrov, 1938, 00:37:33 – 00:38:27.
401 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:04:51 – 01:05:07.
402 Lewin, 2005, 96 – 98.
403 Sinyavsky, 1990, 109.
404 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 15.

exploit it was to continue the tradition of blaming the proverbial *boyars* for everything while he himself appeared as a benevolent figure to the people.[405] While from the Soviet point of view Aleksandrov is repeating this myth that Stalin was creating about himself, on the larger scale he is simply continuing a much older tradition.

The other half of the evil *boyar*'s story in the folklore is naturally the Tsar. Even rulers like Ivan the Terrible were in the peasant consciousness something completely different than what they were in historical reality. Stalin wanted to build a similar image for himself too. He succeeded in creating a cult of personality, but how did the films participate in it? In order to make the Soviet *boyar*'s image more complete, it is here relevant to briefly discuss how is Stalin portrayed in *Volga-Volga* and Aleksandrov's films in general. The brief answer to this question is: "invisibly". Stalin does not appear in Aleksandrov's films as a character, unlike his Tsar counterparts in peasant tales. Although the films in this study are not necessarily[406] the originals from the 1930s and are therefore subject for retrospective censoring, in these films' case it does not seem to be the case because Stalin still *does* appear in the films. He only does not appear as a character, but as a symbol.[407] He does not appear in *Happy Guys* at all, but is met briefly in the ending[408] of *Circus* as people carry his picture in the parade, together with flags, banners and other Soviet regalia. Thus he appears to the film conveniently when the heroes have won. He is part of the scene celebrating the victory of good over evil and, as the scene depicts not only the heroes but also many other marching people and the *Song of the Motherland*, the victory of the whole Soviet Union. Whereas the Tsars in the peasant tales were individual characters, Stalin's image in *Circus* is associated with the whole country and its prospering. He is also not alone, but appears only after the banners of Marx and Lenin have first been shown. Thus he is legitimized as the successor of these two men in Circus, and Salys notes that Aleksandrov uses this same technique later in *Volga-Volga* for the same purpose.[409]

Stalin has a somewhat different role in *Volga-Volga*, but he is no more visible in it than in Aleksandrov's previous film. From the plot's point of view his most prominent role is having a ship named after him. This would not be noteworthy if it was just a random ship with no meaning, but

405 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 28. Reeves (2004, 105) suggests such phenomenon also existed in Nazi Germany, where the criticism against the National Socialist Party increased in the difficult times, but Hitler's image remained mostly good.

406 *Volga-Volga* and *The Radiant Path* do not contain any clear notes about being a later edition, but it is still very possible that they are.

407 *The Radiant Path* contains a scene where the heroine supposedly meets Stalin, but the scene abruptly cuts into the next before Stalin is depicted in person. This suggests that it might have been edited out later. However, Taylor (2011, 206) suggests that this is not a cut scene, but was originally intended like this in the film.

408 Aleksandrov, 1970, 01:25:54 – 01:28:47.

409 Salys, 2009, 209.

this particular ship is the one that helps Strelka's peasant band to continue their journey to Moscow after Byvalov has first abandoned them to the shoals. These scenes follow each other directly, starkly contrasting the evil *boyar*, who first abandoned his people, and the benevolent Tsar who then in the form of a luxurious ship arrives to their help. The connotation is not subtle at all, but instead is made very clear with the camera spending a long time simply showing the ship sailing on Volga with nothing happening, so that the audience certainly has enough time to notice the ship's very visible name from its bow.[410]

Byvalov is in the end very much a Soviet antagonist. He has a clear message to convey and is designed as a character to do it in every possible way. Like von Kneishitz, Byvalov also has a clear pre-revolutionary counterpart. But unlike von Kneishitz, Byvalov has likely been purposefully chosen to continue this tradition because on the one hand it gives a face to the problems in the system, and on the other hand it gives opportunity to strengthen the positive image of the leaders. In von Kneishitz's case "counterpart" might be more appropriate term because the choice was not necessarily intentional. In Byvalov's case, on the other hand, it could with much greater certainty be said that he has his roots in the pre-revolutionary tradition and is simply part of the old tradition adapted for the more modern purposes. Byvalov exists because of Stalin's myth, much like the *boyar* existed because of the benevolent Tsar's myth. Stalin's appearances in Aleksandrov's films support the building of his myth, and by being subtly but clearly enough contrasted with Byvalov in *Volga-Volga* he is especially well becoming the good Tsar, a friend of the peasants against their common enemy. The question asked in von Kneishitz's case is just as relevant in here: if the old method worked, why change it instead of adapting it? People already knew the local power as the traditional enemy from the folklore. It was simple enough to modernize it and turn the *boyar* into a bureaucrat with essentially the same function.

6.5 Moral of the Story

Aleksandrov's third film, the one which should by its theme be the most folkloric one, turns out to be something else. It turns out to be a very Soviet film, and the folk culture it depicts is a culture created for Soviet purposes. While it is not as ideological as *Circus*, it nevertheless creates a very distinct view of the peasants and the countryside. The film's message and ideology is not the "low" folk culture triumphing over the "high" classical culture. It is a very precisely tailored depiction of the folk culture triumphing over a very precisely tailored depiction of the classical culture.

410 Aleksandrov, 1938, 01:05:50 – 01:07:03.

In being so, it is essentially a message of the new world triumphing over the old one to which, ironically enough, the actual pre-revolutionary culture also belonged. It is also a patriotic film and an attempt to make the countryside part of "us", but in doing so it dictates clearly what is meant by the word "countryside" and "peasants" in this context. It is also worth remembering that in being folkloric, Aleksandrov's film does not necessarily need to follow the pre-revolutionary culture. On the contrary, since there was a specific Soviet folklore being created in the era, it would be rather strange from Aleksandrov not to utilize that instead of the pre-revolutionary culture. But it is questionable if he utilizes even that. While the Soviet folklore did not in practice have a lot to do with the pre-revolutionary culture, it at the very least resembled it. Aleksandrov's film, on the other hand, does truly not. Whereas his previous films could be seen as modernized folk tales in several ways, *Volga-Volga* is in essence a new Soviet film depicting new people and new culture. This is not to say that Salys would be wrong in seeing folkloric features in the film. It is true that the characters' one-dimensional nature follow the folk tales' tradition, as well as the film's plot to a certain extent. But as a closer look at the characters themselves has been taken, it has turned out that their resemblance to the folklore is smaller than in the previous films.

Strelka is a Soviet heroine with no clear counterpart in the folk tales. While she has features from folk tales, her breaking of the folklore's conventions in character, appearance, role and even theme music is a telltale sign of her being a herald of the new world instead of a traditional female protagonist. The message she conveys to the audiences, especially the women among them, is not traditional at all and does not even really fit with the era's reality. It is an utopian promise, a Socialist Realist vision of not how things are but how they will be in the new society where women can and will be heroes. Strelka's unusually strong role in the film can be to a certain extent be explained with her actor, Lyubov Orlova, which also explains why the film's male protagonist Trubyshkin does not resemble the folkloric males. He cannot be a hero in the same scale as Strelka is because then he would risk overshadowing Orlova. This is also likely the reason for why he is not a Soviet hero either. While Trubyshkin technically grows in the film, making this more central theme would have made the film his story, and this purpose he was never meant to have. Trubyshkin, unlike all of Aleksandrov's other major characters thus far, does not first and foremost exist to convey his own message, but to amplify Strelka's message. In being her polar opposite, he makes her look better and proves her superiority in the end.

Of all three major characters, Byvalov is the only one with a clear folkloric counterpart and also a

very folkloric purpose in the story. The parallel between the Soviet small-time bureaucrat and a Russian folk tale's *boyar* is striking. The bureaucrat resembles a traditional *boyar* because Stalin wanted to resemble a traditional Tsar, and Byvalov is simply an extension of the conscious taking advantage of the old tradition. When Aleksandrov wanted to depict a petty bureaucrat he also had to make sure to show that he was not making fun of the state. Thus using the old tradition as it was used in the society of the 1930s was a natural choice to evade the possible accusations and censorship. The theme of good Tsar and evil *boyar* was a familiar message to the audiences from the past, but also part of the reality they lived in.

Having analyzed the film it seems that Aleksandrov's supposedly most folkloric film is so far his least folkloric one. A possible explanation for this occurrence is the intention. When Aleksandrov was filming *Happy Guys* and *Circus*, he was making films about something else than folk culture. Each of these films depicted their theme in a Soviet way, but also had connections to the folklore, because the folklore's themes and characters still fitted very well together with the Soviet message and the Socialist Realism. Especially in *Circus* this parallelism was evident.

In *Volga-Volga*, however, Aleksandrov was creating a film about the folk arts and their culture. When they became his central theme, he also ended up depicting them in a certain, more Soviet than pre-revolutionary way. Of course there are still parallels, but those parallels are too separate from each other to form conclusions. The intention of depicting folk culture called for fitting it together with the utopian message of the Soviet new world and new man, and thus ended up being something completely else than what the audiences of old folk tales would have been used to. It could be argued that from the Soviet point of view Aleksandrov succeeded here. He took a familiar theme and world, but turned it into a very optimistic Soviet message. Whether this was actually an effective way to influence the audiences is a different question, but as a piece of educational film art *Volga-Volga* is still rather impressive.

This makes the quartet's last film *The Radiant Path* an interesting film to approach next because it also supposedly has a clear folkloric connection. The film was originally called *Zolushka* (Cinderella), and heavily bases its plot on this old folk tale. But if *Volga-Volga* ended up being something else than initially expected, then what kind of Cinderella do we see in the folk tale's Soviet depiction?

7. *The Radiant Path*

If Aleksandrov recalled that *Happy Guys* was needed because people in its time wanted to see cheerful and optimistic films, he could have said the same about his last film, premiering in 1940. Having already gone to war with Finland between 1939 and 1940 and having the threat of war in Europe extending to the Soviet Union, the people who in the 1930s had seen shortage, collectivization and purges still definitely needed a way to escape the reality somehow. While Aleksandrov himself did no longer, due to the demands of the era, call his film a comedy, the last film in his quartet continues in the vein of the three previous ones in being both cheerful, amusing, optimistic and increasingly educational. Possibly to escape the realities of the early 1940s or to show progress, Aleksandrov's last film exceptionally takes place in the past, not in the idealized present or future. While all of his films so far (even *Happy Guys* to a certain extent) had used the Soviet society as one of their major themes, *The Radiant Path* takes this a step further and refers directly to the Stakhanovite movement, wreckers, five year plans and other concepts familiar to the Soviet audiences from their everyday lives, but not from Aleksandrov's previous films or folklore.

It is therefore somewhat ironical that Aleksandrov's last film is most openly a "fairy tale". *The Radiant Path* takes a step further in the direction started by Aleksandrov's previous film. Not only does it base itself on folk culture, it openly compares itself and its protagonist to Cinderella. By being on the one hand openly based on folklore and on the other hand a strongly Soviet film with clear messages for the old men in the audience, *The Radiant Path* appears paradoxical the same way as *Volga-Volga* turned out to be. The question here, unlike with the previous films, is not if the film and its characters have folkloric influences. They obviously do. Rather the question is how the folklore and the pre-revolutionary past are used here. Could Cinderella truly teach the Soviet audiences the lessons that the state demanded the Soviet cinema to convey, and in what form?

7.1 The Film as a Story

The story of *The Radiant Path* begins in the year 1930, moves on to 1935 and supposedly (though this is not stated outright) ends in the later years of the 1930s. In this time frame the film follows the story of Tanya Morozova, a humble and uneducated countryside maid turned into a Stakhanovite worker and eventually an engineer. Like Aleksandrov's previous films (except arguably *Volga-Volga*), Tanya's story also revolves around a man she falls in love with and her working towards achieving his attention.

Tanya's story begins in a countryside hotel where she works as a maid. Much like her model Cinderella, Tanya also has "an evil stepmother", her employer and mistress, who treats Tanya poorly and makes her do all the work for in the hotel. However, just like magical tales go, Tanya's life changes one day when a stranger arrives to the hotel. This stranger is the film's male lead, engineer Alexei Lebedev from Moscow. Tanya immediately has a crush on him, but unfortunately so does her mistress. When the mistress overhears Lebedev saying that he is not interested in her, she becomes jealous to her maid, throws out all of Tanya's belongings and fires her.

Tanya, however, is not completely alone. Like Cinderella, she has a fairy godmother in form of a kindly elder woman, Maria Sergeevna, who holds a high position in a local weaving mill. She initially helps Tanya by enrolling her to a school and when she learns that Tanya has been fired, she arranges her work as a cleaner in the factory. This begins Tanya's journey from a maid to a worker, as she starts working in the factory and simultaneously studying how to operate a weaving machine. Lebedev also works at this same factory, so Tanya gets to be close to him, but at the same time she has to cope with the clumsy advances of Pyotr, the film's comic relief, who insists on Tanya marrying him.

When Tanya has studied enough, she tries to operate the weaving machines. However, she gets scolded by her supervisor Kurnakov for possibly breaking the machines. Tanya bursts out of Kurnakov's office crying and thus is not there to hear Lebedev telling him after the incident that these particular weaving machines were not good and even the experienced workers had trouble weaving with them. While the others are celebrating the new year's eve at the workers' club, the depressed Tanya is sitting alone outside. She meets Lebedev who ends up talking with her and finally kissing her. Tanya is frightened and shocked by this and runs back to her quarters, crying to a fellow worker that Lebedev is an educated man while she herself cannot even operate the weaving machines. She is interrupted as they notice that there is a fire outside. Tanya runs out but has to evade Pyotr and his romantic notions. She ends up near a storage building where she finds another worker. Her female colleague is afraid for her life because she saw Fyodor, one of the film's antagonists, setting the building on fire. Fyodor arrives and when Tanya tries to defend her colleague, they end up fighting. Tanya is saved by Pyotr who, seeing Fyodor and her so close to each other, jealously thinks they are romantically involved.

The saboteur is not heard after this, but he is supposedly arrested. Tanya resumes her work in the

factory and tries weaving again. She ends up trying to make up for the absence of her colleague on sick leave by operating sixteen machines instead of only eight. While successful, she gets again scolded, this time by the factory's manager Dorokhov who is worried that such attempts will bring only trouble and hamper the factory's adhering to the five year plan. Maria Sergeevna, on the other hand, defends Tanya again. Tanya ends up writing a letter to Molotov about her efforts and in his reply Molotov supposedly endorses her initiative (the film cuts at this point and the response is not shown, having been possibly censored from this version of the film).

Tanya becomes a local celebrity and makes it her goal to break all the records in weaving industry, following the example of coal miner Alexei Stakhanov and the Stakhanovite movement. Tanya manages to temporarily break the record, but soon after hears that another worker in another factory has already surpassed her. Tanya gets depressed and goes crying to her apartment, but gets scolded by Maria who claims she should only be happy that someone else is also working so well for the country's welfare. Tanya realizes that Maria is right, asks her to congratulate this worker on her behalf, and promises to work even harder. While Dorokhov objects again, the rest of the workers support Tanya's efforts and the factory is even expanded to help her in achieving her goals.

Tanya's work does not go unnoticed by the authorities. As her ultimate reward, she is invited to Moscow to receive an award for her efforts. After the ceremony Tanya is left alone. She dances out of joy and sees herself from a mirror, first as the countryside maid she was, then as a factory worker that she became and finally as princess-like character. The princess reflection invites her to step into the mirror and takes her into a flying car with which Tanya travels over the country and the next few years. She appears again in the film's final scenes, speaking as an engineer in All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. There she meets Lebedev and also Pyotr again. Pyotr asks if she is finally ready to get married, to which Tanya says yes and turns to Lebedev. The film ends with the two standing in front of a fountain and the camera slowly panning upwards, revealing the Worker and Kolkhoz Woman -statue behind them.

As the film is based on a folk tale, the clearest folkloric elements in it are the parallels to Cinderella. There are various such elements, ranging from characters to scenes. They shall be discussed more in-depth during the analyzing of the characters as they become relevant. As in his previous films, Aleksandrov has also used other folkloric elements which would have been familiar to the audiences from the tales. Apart from the more obvious mirrors, which Aleksandrov also utilized in *Circus*, one such element are the cranes flying over the country in the film's opening credits. Crane

is an animal associated with the spring and renewal in the Russian tradition, and thus it fits well in the beginning of a film depicting Tanya's progress towards her new life.[411] Emma Widdis, on the other hand, has made a parallel between Tanya's flying car and the folk tales' flying carpet.[412] While the pun in that choice does not translate to Russian, it is nevertheless a sign of the modernization of folk tales which was going on in the country and which Aleksandrov himself had arguably already done in the past in. While the audiences would have likely recognized the flying carpet from the folklore, as Soviet people of the 1930s they also had to recognize another message coded in the flying car. Ownership of a car in the 1930s was reserved only to privileged people, such as officials, outstanding scientists or Stakhanovite workers, and it was a prize given for good work.[413] Thus Tanya having a car at the end of the film has a double meaning, being on the one hand a familiar magical object and a Soviet message showing her success in the society on the other hand.

But as Tanya's story progresses, the film starts deviating more and more from Cinderella, introducing characters and scenes that do not fit in the original folk tale at all. Here a worthy question is how much can a story deviate from the original folklore and still be called a modernized folk tale instead of a completely new story? This would not be such an important question if Tanya's story was not from the beginning compared to Cinderella. Then the film could be like Aleksandrov's earlier films: Soviet story with folkloric parallels and archetypes. But when the story supposedly is a new Cinderella, the question of folklore becomes more difficult and deserves an answer through the character analysis.

7.2 Tanya Morozova: the Stalinist Vasilisa

When a character is openly called "Tanya Cinderella" in the film's opening credits[414] as well as once[415] in the film's early scenes, it is difficult to claim that she would not have at least some similarities with this folkloric character. This is also the way the earlier research on subject has approached her and the film.[416] While such interpretation is the basis of this analysis too, I would like to suggest that the previous research has taken the character of Cinderella a little too much for granted. When they say "Cinderella", they do not define which Cinderella they mean. Even in the European tradition there are several significantly different versions of the famous story, such as

411 Salys, 2009, 316.
412 Widdis, 2003, 143.
413 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 102.
414 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:01:41 – 00:02:18.
415 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:06:59 – 00:07:51. In this scene Lebedev recounts to Tanya and essentially to the audience the tale of Cinderella, making the parallel very obvious.
416 See for example Enzenberger, 1993 in general and Salys, 2009, 316 – 317.

Perrault's and Grimms' version.[417] More importantly Tanya's character has been approached without questioning if the Russian Cinderella is different from the European Cinderella. According to Emerson, there are differences between these two traditions, so I shall therefore begin this analysis by reflecting these differences to Tanya's character and seeing what kind of Cinderella she is.

The first, somewhat minor but yet distinctive difference between the two traditions is Cinderella's beauty. In the Western tradition Cinderella reflects the ideal work ethics by toiling under her evil stepmother but staying nevertheless beautiful: the hard physical work does not change her.[418] Russian Cinderella, on the other hand, takes a more realistic approach and thus, because of her hard work, Cinderella is not always beautiful.[419] Since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it could be argued if Tanya is or is not beautiful throughout the film, but the nature of Aleksandrov's films would compel her to at least avoid being downright ugly. These films are very idealized and meant for cheering up the audiences, so there is no reason for them to show the uglier sides of life. While Tanya's appearance shows occasional dirt, mostly she is prim and proper throughout the film. This takes even absurd forms in a scene[420] where Tanya is walking amongst tens of weaving machines and operating them with her blonde hair uncovered and unfurled. Such a health hazard the real workers of weaving mills would have known to avoid. But to show Lyubov Orlova, the people's favorite, wearing in a scarf, having her hair tied to a knot, and singing *The March of the Enthusiasts* with oil stains or dirt on her face would not have been nearly as glamorous depiction of the everyday work in a weaving mill. So while Tanya here certainly resembles an European Cinderella, this is not necessarily because of Aleksandrov choosing to follow a more European tradition.

Another curious specialty of the Russian Cinderella is her magic doll. In the Russian tradition Cinderella has sometimes inherited from her mother a magic doll which does the work for her, and thus she can keep her hands clean despite of her stepmother giving her more and more tasks.[421] This is an interesting specialty because it could be argued that the whole plot of *The Radiant Path* revolves around a similar theme. It is first seen in the film's beginning scene[422], the time when Tanya's story has strong parallels to Cinderella because of her toiling under her mistress. In the film's beginning the mistress is sleeping, while Tanya gets up early to her chores. She has

417 From now on when discussing "European" Cinderella, I am referring to Perrault's version of the story, because it is one of the best known and has the closest resemblance to Aleksandrov's film.
418 Emerson, 2008, 70.
419 Ibid.
420 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:03:45 – 01:10:30.
421 Emerson, 2008, 70 – 71. An example of such doll can be seen in the tale of Vassilisa [sic] the Fair in Project Gutenberg. See list of electronic sources.
422 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:04:23 – 00:06:18.

mechanized her kitchen, making peeling and boiling potatoes so fast that when her mistress orders her to do it, it is already almost done.[423] This same theme continues later when Tanya gets to the weaving mill and starts operating the machines.

The aforementioned theme is an obviously Soviet one and aims to celebrate the country's industrialization. Tanya in her countryside residence is shown to be an advanced person because she has crudely but efficiently mechanized her otherwise manual labor. Later in the weaving mill she is a Stakhanovite worker, taking the operating of mechanical weaving machines into a completely new level by operating hundreds of them at once alone. However, this theme's paralleling of Russian Cinderella is still interesting because both of them have the same basic message. In the Russian folk tale magic did the work for Cinderella, whereas in Aleksandrov's film it is the machines. Since Aleksandrov has chosen to openly call her character "Cinderella" in the film, there is no need to look for coincidences. He has decided to parallel Cinderella and the Soviet industrialization, essentially continuing the Soviet habit of modernizing the folklore, and here it seems that it is specifically the Russian Cinderella that might have inspired this juxtaposing.

The third difference between the Cinderella traditions is the tale's Prince Charming. This role in the film is reserved for engineer Lebedev and will therefore further be elaborated in analyzing him, but the difference is nevertheless worth mentioning briefly in Tanya's case too. In the Western tradition Prince Charming is heroic and handsome, whereas his Russian counterpart resembles more Ivan the Fool and survives mostly due to incredible luck.[424] While Lebedev does not necessarily follow strictly either of these traditions, the latter justifies depicting Tanya in a more heroic light, since the audiences would not expect the male protagonist of Cinderella to be heroic. As Salys has observed too, in this Aleksandrov continues abandoning the dualistic nature of his previous films and gives more and more attention to Orlova's character due to her increasing popularity among the audiences.[425] While it should be kept in mind that *The Radiant Path* is a Soviet film and not a film version of Cinderella, it is nevertheless clear that the Russian tradition gave Aleksandrov more liberties here in how to depict his female protagonist in relation to the male one.

Of Aleksandrov's previous characters Tanya resembles Anyuta the most. Both are maids with a bad mistress and both end up leaving their service to become something much more glamorous. This

423 Salys (2009, 313) claims the mechanized kitchen is borrowed from Western films. While I have no reason or basis to dispute this, it is more the use of such device to build Tanya's character in relation to Russian Cinderella that is interesting here, rather than where the idea of mechanized kitchen originates from.
424 Emerson, 2008, 71.
425 Salys, 2009, 312.

creates the question if Tanya is then another Ugly Duckling? This is a complicated question without a clear yes or no answer because arguments could be made for both of those perspectives. On the one hand, her story and its beginning are similar. The parallel with *Happy Guys* is likely not coincidental, seeing that Aleksandrov even reuses his first film's theme music's melody in this film's opening scene.[426] Tanya's progress from a peasant maid to an engineer, while an archetypical Soviet success story, would also fit in with the framework of Ugly Duckling's change into a swan.

However, the Ugly Duckling approach is problematic because it implies the central theme of the worst and least appreciated becoming the best. Anyuta's character did fit this because she was the least appreciated character of her film. Right before its end, *Happy Guys* was about the relationship of Kostya and Yelena, whereas Anyuta only later turned out to be the film's real heroine and her change from a maid into a singer supported this. Tanya, on the other hand, is a heroine from the beginning and not specifically unappreciated. While her mistress treats her poorly, she does not receive similar treatment from other characters. In *Happy Guys* Kostya dismissed[427] Anyuta's advances initially, whereas Lebedev is from the beginning[428] more interested in Tanya than any other woman. No one helps Anyuta in *Happy Guys* until the end, whereas Tanya already early meets Maria Sergeevna and, for no reason other than Sergeevna's benevolence, gets sent to a school to improve herself.[429] A little later Sergeevna takes Tanya to work in the weaving mill, again with no real reason other than her benevolence and will to help a countryside girl.

Another problem with this explanation is Tanya's steady progress. In the folk tales where the worst one became the best one, the change was rather sudden. The Ugly Duckling, for example, gets treated poorly throughout the story only to *realize* at the very end that it is a swan by seeing its reflection. Likewise, when a Russian folk tale wanted a hero for such tale, it started by taking the poorest of all the poor peasants who would then become rich in the end, or having Ivan the Fool prove himself to be something different at the end of the story.[430] But Tanya goes through a steady progress of first being a maid, going to school and then being a cleaner in the weaving mill. From this position she moves up to become a worker, eventually breaks all records after learning how to operate the machines and finally becomes an engineer. If the Ugly Duckling theory would be followed, Tanya would more likely go to a factory to seek work in the beginning of the film, have everyone laugh at her peasant origins and then somehow earn the respect of the others by

426 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:06:00 – 00:06:49.
427 Aleksandrov, 1978, 00:45:19 – 00:47:05.
428 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:17:42 – 00:18:26.
429 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:13:19 – 00:14:07.
430 Sinyavsky, 2001, 12 & Morozova, 1977, 236.

miraculously breaking the production records. Traditionally this is where the film would end. Now her breaking of the records, while still somewhat sudden, is explained with a long journey throughout the story instead of a miracle in the end. The miracles do still happen in *The Radiant Path*, but they are different from *Happy Guys*.

As a Soviet character Tanya resembles more Strelka from *Volga-Volga*, and it could be argued that her resemblance to Aleksandrov's previous heroine is stronger than her folkloric connections. While Tanya may take a step back from Strelka's masculinity and infinite energy, she is nevertheless undeniably a heroine from the film's beginning. Whereas Dixon in *Circus* became a heroine and defeated her nemesis von Kneishitz only long into the plot, Tanya does not defeat only one but at least two enemies. The first time[431] is when she stands up for her colleague against the wrecker Fyodor until unwittingly saved by Pyotr and finally the crowd that hears the sounds of fighting. Tanya mentions that she earlier feared Fyodor, which she indeed did, as she asserts in a scene[432] in the film's beginning. She is also fearful of him, although somewhat more defiant than earlier, in the second scene[433] where he appears. But the very fact that Fyodor only really appears three times in the film speaks for his role in the story not to be showing Tanya growing bolder. His arrest happens easily, there is no tension in it or real struggle that would culminate in it. It is not a climax, like arresting von Kneishitz and humiliating Byvalov was the climax of their respective films. And it is no climax like having Cinderella getting married with a prince, leaving behind her stepmother and half-sisters who also desired a marriage with him.

The film's second enemy, the weaving mill's manager Dorokhov, is defeated just as unceremoniously. In a scene[434] late in the film Tanya simply hears that he has been fired and Lebedev has been appointed in his place. Such easy victory is a Soviet instead of folkloric solution. Throughout the film it has been made clear that it is Dorokhov who tries to hold Tanya back, whereas the factory's workers are mostly supporting her efforts of record breaking.[435] But unlike his predecessors, Dorokhov is rather reasonable and makes arguments. This could be because film contains references to the real discussion and events happening around the Stakhanovite movement at the 1930s.[436] In sacking Dorokhov in the end easily Aleksandrov is making a statement regarding this discussion, not following any specific storytelling tradition.

431 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:48:14 – 00:50:06.
432 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:08:03 – 00:08:31.
433 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:31:42 – 00:32:52.
434 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:14:25 – 01:14:36.
435 See for example Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:52:14 – 00:53:31 ; 00:54:47 – 00:55:35 & 01:02:22 – 01:03:34.
436 Salys, 2009, 285 – 286.

Thus, despite of being different in personality from Strelka, Tanya is just as self-evidently a heroine, and again deviates from the folklore somewhat. While Vasilisa the Beautiful, an example of a Russian Cinderella character, is much more a heroine than the Western Cinderella in risking her life to get light from Baba-Yaga, she still needs her magic doll to save her from the difficult situations. While Tanya does in her story have proverbial magic dolls, they are not related to defeating her enemies or getting her out of trouble. Vasilisa was a strong folkloric character, but Tanya takes this even further in the film, to an extent which would not necessarily be familiar to the audiences of the old folk tales, by not needing magic to overcome her enemies.

All in all Tanya's character can be summarized as having more in common with a Russian than Western Cinderella, but to call her Cinderella in the first place is questionable. She has clearly a Soviet purpose and character, and her parallels to the famous folk tale character are carefully chosen in order to first make the character appear familiar to the audiences, but then used to convey a new kind of educational message. While likely an effective tactic from an educational a Soviet film's point of view, from the perspective of this thesis Tanya can only barely be called folkloric. This raises a question if her story can be folkloric if she herself is truly not, but this is a question which is easier to answer once all the characters and the film's aspects have been analyzed first.

7.3 Aleksei Lebedev: the Static Prince Charming

If and when Tanya is Cinderella, although a Russian and Soviet one, then it is logical that the film's male lead would be Prince Charming. But to call Lebedev Prince Charming only because the story is called Cinderella would be misleading. It would also be misleading to call him Prince Charming only because the story is about a humble maid making an impression and eventually starting a relationship with an engineer, a clear parallel to a maid becoming a prince's bride and thus breaking free of the social hierarchy in the old folk tale. To do so would be misleading because arguably this has been the theme of every film so far, except for *Volga-Volga*: Aleksandrov's male leads before the third film were always somehow more prominent or better than the female protagonist, and the latter had to change and go through her journey in order to make impression to the former. To call Kostya and Martynov Prince Charmings too would be giving this name to every male protagonist in every story where the female protagonist's ultimate prize is the male protagonist's love.

Instead, in order to call Lebedev Prince Charming, he should be compared to the actual Prince

Charming of Cinderella. This forms the basis of his character's analysis. Since this film's characters are for the first time within this study compared directly to specific characters of a specific tale instead of archetypes, it should be stated in the beginning that parallels in this analysis do not aim to have perfect correlation. If Lebedev turns out to be Prince Charming, he is still only proverbial Prince Charming at most. The real Prince Charming in Cinderella's tale was, after all, a fairly minor character. He arranged the ball, fell in love with Cinderella, found her by fitting the shoe in her foot and then married her. Lebedev, on the other hand, is a Soviet film's male protagonist featured from the film's first minutes onwards and thus can be expected to have a much more prominent role in the story. This still should not disqualify him from being a folkloric character if the parallels otherwise match.

As was mentioned earlier, the European and Russian Prince Charmings are quite different from each other. To start the comparison it should be established which tradition Lebedev represents, if any. To start with the clearest indication, it is difficult to deny that Lebedev is handsome, like it was difficult to deny that Tanya is beautiful. Here the European tradition seems to be followed more, but on the other hand the same argument that was made in Tanya's case applies in here too. Lebedev's handsome appearance is not necessarily a result of European or Russian tradition, but instead the Soviet tradition. The heroes in Aleksandrov's films, and Soviet films in general, have always stood out with their appearance. It could be argued that having a handsome hero and a beautiful heroine is not even a Soviet tradition but an universal law of the cinema in which non-handsome heroes are an exception. However, in a socialist realist Soviet film, where the didactic purpose of the cinema had to have clear heroes and enemies with a lesson, this tradition is emphasized.

Despite of being a positive character and a hero (as opposed to antagonist or a minor character) in the film, Lebedev is not particularly heroic like Tanya. The old tradition of a strong male hero protecting and saving the weak woman is broken already in the beginning of the film in a scene[437] where Pyotr is teasing Tanya and trying to forcibly kiss her. Tanya fends her off all by herself and Pyotr leaves the scene, sobbing and wondering why Tanya is not acting like a maid at all. Lebedev arrives only after this to ask if she is alright, to which Tanya replies by angrily throwing a broom after Pyotr. This is quite a leap from the pre-revolutionary era's films where the woman's role was to be seduced by a man, in which case Pyotr would have been successful. It is also taking a step away from Cinderella, and folk tales in general, where the characters had far more clear and stereotypical roles, and no other male would have been competing with Prince Charming for Cinderella's love.

437 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:11:07 – 00:12:42.

The overly romantic and somewhat desperate Pyotr is clearly a comic relief in the film, and his character's origins may well therefore be in the original American musical comedies which Aleksandrov to a certain extent attempted to emulate.

In Perrault's fable Prince Charming fell in love with Cinderella and wanted to know who was the mysterious girl that dropped her shoe. He made an effort to find this out by having all the maidens in the kingdom to try it on. Lebedev, on the other hand, seems oblivious to the matters of love. This is evident in another early scene[438] where Tanya approaches him and initially asks him to help her with a mathematical problem, but in reality wants to know what Lebedev thinks of her mistress. Lebedev at first does not even understand what Tanya is talking about. When he finally confirms that he is not interested in her mistress, Lebedev does not understand why Tanya becomes suddenly so happy. After she has left, the camera still stays a long time on Lebedev scratching his head and finally shrugging. This is repeated again in a later scene[439] where Tanya is walking around the weaving mill, writing a list of children to be given gifts by Komsomol. As she meets Lebedev, she first wants to know if he is married or has children. When Lebedev says no to both, Tanya again becomes happy. Lebedev once more does not understand what is going on and comes across as a little slow witted individual, emphasized by the camera again focusing on his person and his colleague turning away when Lebedev tries to look at him for advice.

These two scenes are a far cry from the Prince Charming who would go a long way to find the love of his life and, with his determination and the help of magic, succeed in this task with relative ease. On the other hand, it has certain resemblance to the classic fool who was a popular and funny character among the practical peasants precisely because of being their opposite. As an engineer, Lebedev may be intelligent and educated but his high social status is humbled in the film by making him oblivious to the matters of love. The common man in the audience might have very well felt that he knew these matters much better than the esteemed engineer in the film.

Prince Charming held a ball to which he invited the kingdom's young women. There is a parallel to this in the film, seen in the scene[440] where the workers of the weaving mill are celebrating the new year's eve. Together with the film's beginning, this is one of the clearest allusions to Cinderella. The scene begins right after Tanya has been scolded by her supervisor for trying to operate the weaving machines and she has fled from the factory. Tanya, like Cinderella, sees the ball to which she is not

438 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:16:47 – 00:18:51.
439 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:25:46 – 00:26:54.
440 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:37:54 – 00:44:44.

invited when she sees people going into the workers' club and dancing. However, instead of a fairy godmother arranging her a passage into the club, Lebedev instead comes to her and meets her outside. Instead of the fairy godmother, it is he who turns Tanya into a princess by putting on her head a decorative crown. This spell does not break by midnight like Cinderella's, which is made clear by first showing the clock hitting the midnight hour and the two starting to dance only after that. But when Lebedev takes Tanya aside and kisses her, the spell breaks. Tanya tells him to stop and finally ends up throwing him into snow and running away. In the scene[441] following this one she cries to a fellow worker, depressed because she considers herself to be not worth Lebedev.

The most radical change to the folk tale is that the ball is no more held by Prince Charming, but instead by the factory and thus, in the end, the state. This is a fitting modernization of the old folk tale, but it changes the role of Lebedev as Prince Charming significantly. By being only one guest among the others he loses his special relationship to the scene. On the other hand, he takes some of it back because the scene omits the fairy godmother who was instead alluded to in the dreamy scene[442] where Maria Sergeevna took Tanya to the factory for the first time.

By removing the original magic from the scene, Aleksandrov has replaced it with the Soviet magic where the spell is not broken by the midnight but by the class difference between the two protagonists. Cinderella, despite of being a maid, never had a problem with her love being a prince. In the Soviet version the class difference is emphasized. Seeing that the film takes place before Stalin's constitution of 1936, Aleksandrov may have wanted to make an allusion to the past again. After all, one of the most significant events of the 1930s was the new constitution, and one of its major goals was to loosen the class society, which had still been an important part of the previous constitution of 1924.[443] On the one hand, this loosening concerned mostly the classes that had previously been considered hostile, and they could not be discriminated based on their class anymore.[444] However, it still carried a message of the people being Soviet citizens instead of classes, and thus in emphasizing the class difference in this scene that takes place before 1936, Aleksandrov may have wanted to say that, to paraphrase Stalin's famous slogan, "life has become better". However, it might also be in the story simply to motivate and explain Tanya's progress of eventually becoming an engineer herself.

441 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:44:45 – 00:46:06.
442 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:21:03 – 00:23:16.
443 Siegelbaum ; Sokolov & Hoisington, 2000, 158 – 160.
444 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 179.

While this scene is an allusion to Cinderella's scene where Prince Charming featured prominently, it is still Tanya's scene in the end. As a plot point it resembles the scene from *Happy Guys* where Kostya was expelled from Yelena's house. This is the lowest point of Tanya's story. First she is seen leaving the factory in tears, then meeting the love of her life and kissed by him only to end up bitterly reminding herself of her earlier failure with the machines and being sure that she will not ever deserve Lebedev's affection due to their class differences. Lebedev and the affection he shows are only means to an end to make her really miserable in this scene. But from there on things start looking up: Tanya catches a wrecker, starts breaking records and becomes a celebrated worker. While she still has to overcome one obstacle (factory manager Dorokhin), this low point in the story still serves, as was traditional, to begin her new life. This is symbolized also by the party being specifically a new year's eve party, the clock passing midnight and Lebedev and Tanya wishing each other happy new year.

Whereas Cinderella's Prince Charming only appeared in the late part of the tale, Lebedev's role in the film is strongest in the beginning and in the middle of it, but starts gradually diminishing after that. After the new year party Lebedev does not disappear from the film per se, but he and Tanya have very little contact with each other and Lebedev does not do anything spectacular in the film that would somehow develop his character. However, he appears again prominently in the film's ending scene[445]. Prince Charming also appeared at the end of Cinderella's story, but Lebedev's role in the film's end is quite different from the folklore's prince who went great lengths for finding the girl he had danced with. He simply comes to the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition where Tanya, now an engineer herself, is giving a speech. Like Prince Charming, he does not at first recognize Tanya, but he knows she is there because in a previous scene[446] he is told that Tanya has specifically asked him to be present. Instead of having a parallel to the magical glass shoe, the problem is solved by Maria Sergeevna simply telling him who Tanya is from among the crowd.

The main difference between Prince Charming and Lebedev in this scene is the complete lack of magic. Magic and miracles have happened in the story, but they have been exclusive to Tanya. Right before the ending, Tanya has been through the long scene[447] where she has seen her progress from a mirror, stepped inside it and then flown over the country and the years in a car to finally arrive to the Exhibition. The ending scene is a continuation for this. The magic has already happened. Now is the time for the happy ending. Because of the plot, this happy ending could be

445 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:27:10 – 01:33:28.
446 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:25:05 – 00:25:18.
447 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:18:23 – 01:24:57.

nothing else than Lebedev and Tanya finally getting each other. But Lebedev himself is rather irrelevant. He is an object, the prize which the heroine finally wins after her long and difficult journey. He himself does nothing else than be present and quietly walk with Tanya into a garden, where they (after a brief comic relief with Pyotr and a short dialogue) are then portrayed with the statue of Worker and Kolkhoz Woman behind them. To be a proper Prince Charming here he should at least do *something*. But as his role in the film is increasingly diminished after its middle point, the film becomes increasingly Tanya's story and the end is logically therefore Tanya's ending. This ending, while deviating from the folklore, is fitting for the film, but it distances Lebedev as a character further from his model.

Therefore, to finally answer the question if Lebedev is Prince Charming or not, the answer seems to be no. He fits the role of Prince Charming as far as the story of Cinderella is concerned, but as a character he differs from the original significantly. Since *The Radiant Path* is in several ways a modernization of a folk tale, this is not surprising. Lebedev is initially folkloric in being an allusion to Prince Charming, but he ultimately is not folkloric in being too different from his model and not fitting properly any other folk tale archetype either. The phenomenon here is similar to what happened in *Volga-Volga*: when Aleksandrov specifically chose to get his inspiration from the folk tradition, the results ended up being completely different.

7.4 When the Stepmother Is Not Enough: the New Enemies of Cinderella

The Radiant Path deviates from the pattern Aleksandrov has used with his antagonists so far, and therefore the so far used dividing of characters into female and male protagonist as well as the antagonist does not work anymore. Instead of just one, *The Radiant Path* has three[448] antagonists of whom no one could really be called primary in the way the previous films' antagonists were. While all of Aleksandrov's antagonists so far have been rather one-dimensional, these three characters are even more so. Except for the weaving mill's manager Dorokhov, none of them gets much time on the silver screen or have their characters elaborated. More than anything, each of them serves to convey a brief, educational message to the audiences before disappearing from the film. Two of these messages are already familiar from the previous films. The third message is new for Aleksandrov, but not really new for the Soviet audiences.

Chronologically the first antagonist introduced in the film is Tanya's mistress. Folklorically

448 It could be argued that there are even more if Tanya's supervisor Kurnakov, for example, is considered a villain, but I have chosen to analyze the three that I consider the most prominent ones in the film.

speaking she is of course Cinderella's stepmother. It is therefore not surprising that her initial sin is laziness, shown in the film's opening scene[449] where Tanya wakes up early to do her chores, whereas her mistress does not even try to get up from the bed. Much like Aleksandrov's previous villains, she is also capricious and temperamental, firing Tanya and throwing her belongings out of their apartment simply because Lebedev admitted not liking her to Tanya.[450] In both her role as well as her behavior Tanya's mistress bears a striking resemblance to Yelena, all the way to breaking up with her maid and this time visibly driving her out for perceived defiance. Thus, in a way, she repeats in a condensed form what Yelena was used to convey. But unlike Yelena, she is not important. Appearing only in the beginning of the film, she is more a storytelling motif than an antagonist. Of all the antagonists in the film, she has the clearest folkloric counterpart, and she also helps in making Tanya somewhat more folkloric. Her parallel to Cinderella's stepmother and half-sisters is made clear in the scene[451] where Lebedev recounts Cinderella's tale to Tanya. As soon as he has begun "once upon a time, there lived three sisters", the camera cuts to show a window from which Tanya's mistress and her friend are peeking out to see him.

While the film strongly and clearly parallels the story of Cinderella here, it deviates from the original story soon. As the mistress fires Tanya, she also makes her a folkloric female protagonist, being forced to leave her home to go on adventure. In Tanya's case this actually matters because it happens early in the story and in that way follows the folk tale motifs more than Anyuta leaving her mistress' house late in the story. But when the adventure begins and the mistress disappears from the story, *The Radiant Path* also starts resembling more and more a Soviet story instead of a folk tale. It could therefore be summarized that the mistress' purpose as an antagonist is to make it very clear to the audiences, supposedly familiar with the stories of Cinderella or Vasilisa the Beautiful, that Tanya is Cinderella and therefore legitimize her otherwise very Soviet story in the eyes of the audiences to whom the folkloric connections in Aleksandrov's films so far might have been visible, but not outright told. It is therefore an important detail that the most folkloric antagonist also comes first. Salys has noted that the film being based on familiar elements of the folk tales made it easier for people to understand.[452] While I have attempted to argue earlier that this observation could be applied to all of Aleksandrov's other films more or less too, it is clearest in *The Radiant Path* by being said out loud in the film's beginning.

449 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:04:22 – 00:06:45.
450 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:18:51 – 00:19:16.
451 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:06:59 – 00:07:51.
452 Salys, 2009, 316.

As the film starts deviating from its folkloric start, so do the antagonists. The second introduced enemy, Fyodor the wrecker, is the most serious of all the three enemies discussed here and most clearly depicted as evil. He appears only three times in the film, but each of those times is used to leave no doubt of his nature. The first time is early in the film, in the scene[453] where Lebedev arrives to the hotel where Tanya is working. Here Fyodor is contrasted with Lebedev in many ways. Lebedev makes Tanya laugh and a calm melody starts playing on the background. He leaves behind an empty "Moscow" brand cigarette pack depicting the city. Tanya is left looking at the picture and dreaming, but is suddenly interrupted by Fyodor. The music ends abruptly. Tanya becomes frightened and leaves quickly. Such jump from the tranquil and dreamlike scene to a frightening one makes it clear during the film's first minutes that this person is not a good character in the film. In the second scene[454] where he appears, Fyodor is depicted as outright strange. He finds Tanya in her room and, after confirming that she is alone, tries to touch her. His attempts are prevented only by Pyotr, whose coughing behind the room's window makes Fyodor nervous when he thinks Tanya has someone there to defend her. Throughout the scene Fyodor keeps laughing nervously and the way he leaves is also suspicious, seeing that he sneaks out of the room instead of walking, and keeps looking around.

This exaggerated strangeness further builds his character for his final appearance[455], for which he exists in the film. Here Fyodor deviates from most of Aleksandrov's antagonists so far. In his previous films, except in *Circus*, Aleksandrov has used relatively harmless antagonists. They have been unpleasant people, but to consider them a serious danger to the society, or even to the protagonists, would be exaggerating their capabilities. Fyodor has also been clearly an antagonist, but still mostly just an unpleasant person in his first two appearances, but the third one makes it clear that he is not only unpleasant, he is outright evil and dangerous. Setting the factory's warehouse on fire is far more serious than what Yelena or Byvalov would have ever been capable of, but it is not the only thing he does. When Tanya finds her colleague crying near the warehouse on fire, the worker is frightened for her life because she saw Fyodor doing the deed and is certain that the wrecker now wants to kill her. Tanya later affirms this in the scene when Pyotr and Fyodor are wrestling by warning Pyotr that Fyodor is going to kill him. A life threatening situation is not a motif seen before in Aleksandrov's films. Even von Kneishitz in all his evilness never threatened anyone's life directly.

453 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:06:40 – 00:08:29.
454 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:31:44 – 00:32:52.
455 Aleksandrov, 1940, 00:47:17 – 00:50:06.

It is difficult to find a folkloric counterpart for Fyodor from the peasant tales' enemies. While Fyodor is unpleasant and frightening to Tanya, his greatest sin in the film is being an arsonist. The enemies of the folk tales were enemies in that they and the protagonist had somehow a personal bond. The hero of a wonder tale went on journey to retrieve something or someone that the antagonist had stolen away. If the tale was about a rich and a poor peasant, they were not just any rich and poor peasants, but brothers.[456] Cinderella's antagonist was her evil stepmother and her half-sisters: she never had to deal with a corrupted servant starting a fire in castle in the middle of Prince Charming's ball. As a character, Fyodor has too little time to truly become a relevant antagonist in this sense. His defeat is not a climax, but on the contrary is not even mentioned after it has taken place. The film continues as if nothing had happened.

On the other hand, Fyodor is very much a Soviet enemy. He fits perfectly Kenez's archetype of an enemy who is always a man, always tries to somehow destroy communism (thus his attack on the factory, state's property, instead of Tanya's person), and who mostly "limits his activities to blowing things up".[457] For the Soviet audience he was not a new enemy. It is in fact rather surprising that Aleksandrov decided to use a saboteur as an enemy only once in his four films, and only in the last one, when this archetype was in one form or another one of the favorite enemies of the Soviet propaganda during the era.[458]

Aleksandrov may have meant to make an allusion to the past here. The film takes place mostly during the first half of the 1930s, so it is also logical that a popular type of enemy from that time period would make an appearance in the film. Furthermore, the film depicts Stakhanovite movement, and together with it began also an official campaign against saboteurs.[459] Therefore his intention may have also been to make the film appear more realistic and historical, because the audiences were likely familiar with these events. But the appearance of a more dangerous, domestic enemy in Aleksandrov's otherwise light films might also be an indication of the change that happened in the society after the Great Purges. Before the Great Purges of 1937 – 1938 the concept of enemy had usually been "class enemy", which gave certain logic to the terror: during and after the purges, however, it changed to "enemy of the people", a much wider term which could be applied theoretically to anyone.[460] This logically multiplied the amount of possible enemies. With more possible enemies a film's message had to be stronger too to make the importance of vigilance

456 Sokolov, 2012, 484.
457 Kenez, 2001, 144.
458 Kenez, 1993, 57.
459 Salys, 2009, 286.
460 Fitzpatrick, 1999, 191 – 192.

even clearer for the audiences. From the story's point of view Fyodor is a villain and exaggerated to make it obvious, but from an educational point of view he is an ordinary citizen who only turns out to be a saboteur later because no one was vigilant enough to stop him in time.

With all this considered it seems clear that Fyodor exists as an enemy solely on the Soviet foundation, as an image of his time, and has no resemblance to the folk culture like many of his predecessors. His message to the audiences is a Soviet one with no parallels to the pre-revolutionary culture. Concern for the common property or being aware of backstabbing internal enemies, who would masquerade as decent citizens or even friends, had no place in the folk tales which were more interested in the personal struggle of the hero and the antagonist.

The third and final enemy is the factory manager Dorokhin. Unlike Fyodor, Dorokhin is not an evil enemy per se. He could be more described as a living obstacle to Tanya's dreams, trying to hold her back and prevent her from breaking the records. By using another petty official as the middleman between the heroine's and the state's ambitions, it seems at first that Aleksandrov is essentially creating another Byvalov in a smaller scale. But unlike Dorokhin, Byvalov was constructed carefully, starting from his body language, to make fun of the small-time bureaucrats and point out their shortcomings. Dorokhin, on the other hand, takes a more serious approach to the folkloric and Soviet theme of *boyar* ruining everything.

The clearest case of Aleksandrov making this statement again happens in two short scenes[461] following each other. In the first one Dorokhin and his colleague are complaining to each other about the new kind of workers (Stakhanovites) likes of whom have not been seen even in old European industrial cities. Dorokhin calls the record breaking efforts of the Stakhanovites "absolutely absurd", and in the end both of them look directly at the camera saying they cannot break down the factory's walls in order to accommodate to Tanya's dreams. Following right after this, Maria Sergeevna is giving a speech to the workers about doing exactly what the manager just refused to do. Her speech alone is a very powerful indication of what these two scenes following each other mean to tell to the audiences, but it is reinforced further by the objects seen in the scene. Maria is holding an issue of the newspaper *Pravda* with a big picture of Ordzhonikidze, a member of the Politburo and the Commissar of Heavy Industry during the film's events, whom she quotes in her speech. On the background are a picture of Tanya and a bust of Lenin.

461 Aleksandrov, 1940, 01:02:22 – 01:03:34.

Using these objects in such way leaves little doubt of their connotation. Tanya's efforts are linked to the will of the state, and setting her picture next to Lenin's bust further legitimizes her dreams. Aleksandrov had previously legitimized Stalin's regime the same way by showing Lenin's picture and statue in his films only moments before referring to Stalin. This practice boils down to adhering to the official story of origins as observed by Prokhorov in the myth of the Great Family. It is about tracing the roots of any given positive phenomenon back to the October Revolution, the beginning of the new era, and thus making it a legitimate a part of the sacred Soviet narrative's continuum.

Dorokhin never gets this kind of legitimization and serves mostly as a polar opposite against which Tanya's status as a heroic worker is easier to construct. The state is clearly on the workers' side, just like the Tsar was on the peasants' side in the folk tradition. Dorokhin is not contrasted as often with the state as Byvalov was, but this is understandable because he is not as important character either and has to share his place as the film's antagonist with other characters. Rather it could be said that when he is contrasted with the state, it is done in a much stronger way than in Byvalov's case by making direct references to real life politicians disagreeing with his assessment.

While the message remains the same, something has changed here. Byvalov as a *boyar* was an essential character for the story, and in this *Volga-Volga* resembled the folk tales by making the struggle of the peasants and the *boyar* a central theme. Dorokhin, on the other hand, is a more one-dimensional Soviet character who appears in the film only briefly and only to make a propagandistic point. The story does not revolve around him, and while the struggle is mentioned in no uncertain terms, it is not made a central theme. In this way *The Radiant Path* takes a step away from the folk tradition, whereas *Volga-Volga* still adhered to it.

7.5 Moral of the Story

When the old man in the audience saw Tanya being compared to Cinderella, he undoubtedly recognized the old folk tale as the film's framework. Tanya's resemblance to the Russian Cinderella instead of the European one made this all the more likely. However, as the film progressed, the old man was given less and less morals and lessons that would have been familiar from Cinderella. Cinderella is, essentially, a classical fairy tale where the protagonist starts as a poor maid and through magic ends up marrying a prince. Tanya's story, on the other hand, is a Soviet success story where the poor maid through her own hard work and perseverance clears her way from the bottom of the society's hierarchy to a much higher position. Tanya's virtues in the film are many, and it is in

the end these virtues that make her successful. Magic and miracles happen to her, but they are more symbolical than they were for the real Cinderella. This is especially evident in the film's ending and the scene depicting the new year's eve. Both the story's ending and Prince Charming's ball involved magic solving problems for Cinderella. In Aleksandrov's film both of these scenes either lack the magical aspect completely, or the magic has a clearly more Soviet tone, which could be argued not to be a magical aspect at all.

Tanya is initially a familiar character, but through her virtues and progressing in the story conveys a very political and Soviet message. While it could be argued that she is a modernized Cinderella and therefore does not owe loyalty to the folk tale character, Aleksandrov has still decided to call her Cinderella in the film. By doing so he has essentially set himself a high bar. If Tanya was not called Cinderella, it would be different. Then she could be compared more to an archetype instead of a specific character. But when a parallel is made to a specific character, there is a point when Tanya and her story start deviating too much from the original story. The simple reality seems to be that the real Cinderella was not enough for Aleksandrov to convey the Soviet message that he wanted, and so the ties to the original folk tale start becoming more and more loose.

Lebedev, like Tanya, is folkloric in that he has a model in Cinderella's story. As this kind of character he too resembles more Russian than European tradition, though there are signs of both. But ultimately he is not Prince Charming, not even a modernized one. Lebedev, like his predecessor Trubyshkin, is not a very Soviet character either: while he is a positive character, he does not have a clear didactic message for the audience, nor does he at any point try to convey any political or moral thought. He is difficult to take for an ideal new man because while he is good, he is not idolized the way Martynov, for instance, was: a superman with no weaknesses. He has next to no real dialogue in the film that would build this character or give him an independent meaning in the story. He is an object, a character that exists only because Tanya's story requires it. It is Tanya who conveys the lessons of positive hero in the film, and Lebedev only assists her.

Like in *Volga-Volga*, this is a stark deviation from the pre-revolutionary culture, or even Aleksandrov's earlier films in which Kostya was the protagonist of the first one and Martynov was at least Dixon's equal in the second one. Once again, the rising popularity of Lyubov Orlova is the most apparent explanation here, but it nevertheless gives Aleksandrov's last film's male protagonist a feature which was not common in the pre-revolutionary culture. While Cinderella's story obviously focuses on the female Cinderella, Prince Charming was still an independent actor who

did something in the story. He was not just a man whom Cinderella wanted to marry and who appeared in the story only to stand around and say a few lines before the narrative focused back on Cinderella's efforts to overcome her antagonists.

With three prominent antagonists to overcome, *The Radiant Path* is not lacking messages telling the audiences what kind of people are the enemies of the new society. However, seeing that the film in the beginning makes so strong parallel to Cinderella, it is somewhat surprising to see that only one of them is clearly inspired by the folk tale. Of the remaining two one fits both the Soviet and the folk tradition, whereas the other is not folkloric at all. These enemies make the film more a new Soviet film instead of an adaptation of the folk tales and their motifs. Using three antagonists instead of only one like before also indicates another change in Aleksandrov's style, in addition to decreasing the significance of the male protagonist in favor of the female one. He is abandoning the love triangle where the defeat of the antagonist heralded the female and the male protagonist finally having no more obstacles for their romance. Instead he introduces minor antagonists who alone are not important, but together form an obstacle after obstacle in Tanya's story.

On the one hand this may again be explained with Lyubov Orlova's popularity. In addition to decreasing the male lead's role, dropping out the single major antagonist gives even more time to concentrate on Orlova. On the other hand it may also indicate a change in the Soviet film scene. Of the four films *Happy Guys*, which was filmed when the Socialist Realism was only becoming the major doctrine of the Soviet art, was arguably the least ideological. From there on the official ideology was more integral part of the remaining three films. It could be argued that this argument is false because *Circus* was possibly the most ideological of these films, and it premiered in 1936. On the other hand, earlier has also been proposed the theory that Aleksandrov made it a very ideological film to justify his own work. During the making of *The Radiant Path*, which premiered six years later than *Happy Guys*, it might have been less of a choice for him. This is supported by Salys' observation that Aleksandrov himself was not entirely happy with *The Radiant Path* partly because the officials had changed some scenes which he would have wanted to do in some other way.[462]

Using the three enemies which serve short, propagandistic message, rather than being fully constructed characters in the film like their predecessor, might have been due to these tightened demands of the ideology and making the films even more didactic and adherent to the official

462 Salys, 2009, 302.

ideology than they had been before in the 1930s. This might also explain the nature of the enemies and the focus on their Soviet rather than folkloric nature. This applies especially to Fyodor who deviates strongly from what Aleksandrov had done before, and who is, despite of being a minor character, arguably one of his most evil and dangerous antagonists. It was now more important to convey the message of vigilance for the new man than to make him laugh.

Aleksandrov's last film of the 1930s, while initially seeming like very folkloric, turns out to be a very Soviet one. Folklore in *The Radiant Path* is used like the folk arts were used in *Volga-Volga*: intentionally. Aleksandrov has chosen to parallel Cinderella, but modernize the story and fit so many contemporary political morals into it that it no longer has much to do with the actual pre-revolutionary culture.

8. New films, Old Tales

Having analyzed Aleksandrov's four films from the 1930s, I believe a pattern can now be formed and explained in the study's final conclusions. This thesis' task was to find out what kind of relationship Aleksandrovs new Soviet films had with the old, pre-revolutionary folklore. The assumption in the beginning was that while the films were used for educating the audiences about the new way of life and society, somehow the pre-revolutionary culture and its folk tales still might have lived in them. Now that the four films and their main characters have been analyzed, it seems this assumption is correct, but the films are not a perfect continuation of the pre-revolutionary culture. Rather the films, their characters and the message they convey about ideal society and person are a mix of new and old tradition.

The analysis has shown that while Aleksandrov gave the Soviet audiences something new in introducing musical comedy to them in a Soviet format, the stories he conveyed through this new medium were in many parts familiar to the Soviet people from their old folk tales and beliefs. Throughout the thesis I have raised the possibility of coincidence as an explanation for this. Perhaps it was a coincidence that Kostya resembled a fool. Perhaps the devilish qualities of von Kneishitz were not intended. In some cases, such as Byvalov resembling a *boyar* or Tanya being new Cinderella, the parallel was clearly intended, but in some cases the coincidence seemed like a valid explanation.

However now, in the final conclusions, I no longer believe that coincidence is a valid explanation

for these occurrences in general. This study has analyzed fourteen characters of which ten have been either directly or indirectly influenced by folklore and had parallels with it. Furthermore, the analysis of the films has shown that Aleksandrov also uses folkloric elements and motifs in each of them the same way they were used in the pre-revolutionary tales. In his last two films the use of folk elements has clearly been intentional. It can not be ruled out that it would not have been so in his first two films too, even if it was not the central theme of those films. After all, the film with most folkloric connections found in this study was his second one, *Circus* from 1936.

Aleksandrov's films also indicate a change happening in how they use the folklore. In the first two films the use of folk culture was not emphasized in any way, whereas in the latter two films it was central part of the film's identity. Ironically in these films, where the folklore's presence was supposed to be strongest, the Soviet influences were particularly strong. The intention plays a large role here. What ever was the central theme of each of Aleksandrov's films, be it jazz, circus or Cinderella, it was used to convey a Soviet message. When Aleksandrov used the folk culture as the central theme of his films, it became a Soviet depiction of the theme and did not correlate well with the original anymore. In this way Aleksandrov was indeed showing the future new men something new, but his use of the familiar culture undoubtedly made the message more comprehensible and easier to accept.

The development of the Socialist Realism does not fully explain the change in the use of folkloric elements. While the demands got higher and the censorship tighter, which also affected Aleksandrov's last film in particular, it did not altogether remove the folkloric elements from the films. On the contrary, the two most obviously folkloric films are both from the end of the 1930s when the new doctrine already had had enough time to establish itself. The Socialist Realism therefore clearly set restrictions and demands for the films (here the term "positive censorship" from Emerson, the demand of what *must* be said, is worth remembering), but it accepted and even endorsed the use of pre-revolutionary culture to fulfill this goal in Aleksandrov's case. As Gorky had said, the best hero archetypes already existed in the pre-revolutionary folklore. Why would Aleksandrov not have tried to adapt them to convey his message?

The folk tales also fit Aleksandrov's goals because of their utopian nature. While not all tales were utopian and Aleksandrov has also had influences from the tales of everyday life, his films, while taking place in the Soviet Union, still very much depict the "other kingdom". The difference is that his films, except for the last one in the quartet, depict either the contemporary era or possibly near

future instead of the past. The message still is technically the same. The message of the Soviet films, and Aleksandrov's as well, was that the "other kingdom" should not remain "the other", but should and would be made reality. Only they would have rather referred to it as a new society. Every member in the audience would have likely recognized the discrepancies between the reality and Aleksandrov's films, but precisely by doing like the tale tellers of the past and taking the audience into a wonderland, Aleksandrov managed to both gain popularity among the people as well as fulfill the demands of the optimism set by the Socialist Realism.

The wondrous tales still served as well as before the revolution as an escape from the reality and showing the people sights they could not have otherwise experienced. This is especially true in how Aleksandrov depicts Moscow, but is visible otherwise too. The vast majority of the target audiences for these films were people who could not travel with the same ease as a modern viewer, and to them the sights Aleksandrov showed them in the films must have been literally like from another world. This reality is also reflected in the films when a simple pack of cigarettes depicting Moscow is enough for the countryside girl Tanya to get lost in her thoughts and start dreaming. It was likely just as magical for the viewers from the remote parts of the country where electricity, for example, was still just a word instead of reality.

Linked to the other world is also the concept of miracle. The stories and therefore the problems in Aleksandrov's films almost invariably start from the countryside, the world which was familiar to the majority of the potential viewers. The problems are then solved by going to Moscow, where the miracles happen and everything becomes better. On a larger scale this also serves to show the country's progress and industrialization in the 1930s, but on smaller level further enhances the magical nature of the stories. The Soviet miracles are the new technology, the new society and the new man, but they are no less miracles than flying carpets, fairy godmothers and young peasants boys defeating dragons and marrying princesses. As has been observed in the study, these old miracles were also still very useful for Aleksandrov in telling the audiences about the new ones.

The use of folklore in the new films has several explanations. One very plausible explanation is the one proposed earlier by Salys: the use of familiar themes made the films easier to understand and legitimized the Soviet regime. Aleksandrov was a Soviet director, a worker in the state's cultural industry, and one of his tasks was to educate people as effectively as possible with the new mass medium called cinema. He had grown up in the industry at the time when Avant-Garde was prominent and must have realized why it failed in this task. The Soviet authorities in the 1930s

demanded films for the millions, and Aleksandrov answered by basing many aspects in his films on the stories that were already familiar to the millions. Even if there was no demand to educate people or Aleksandrov would not have adhered to it (as seen in *Happy Guys* being rather non-ideological for a Soviet film), the use of familiar motifs would have been useful for any director because it no doubt made the films more popular. When cinema was still a fairly new form of entertainment in Soviet Union in the 1930s, especially in the countryside, it had all the possibilities to take a new direction. The Soviet state's ambition for building a new society and creating a new man would have fitted into such direction ideologically well. But as the Avant-Garde had already tried that and proven that it was not what the people wanted, it was only sensible for a director to instead give the audiences more familiar stories in new form like the earliest Russian directors had done before the revolution.

Another explanation, closely linked to the previous one, is identity. A new man and new society are not created by someone with authority simply saying that they should be created. The Russians do not suddenly cease to be Russians simply because someone with authority decides to call them Soviets. The history of Soviet Union shows quite clearly that persecution and forced change works only to a certain extent and does not achieve the desired results. The Russian people did not cease being religious simply because religion was banned. They did not stop playing popular folk songs or jazz simply because folk songs and jazz were banned. An identity of one person, not to mention millions of them, can possibly be changed slowly, but erasing and replacing it is much more difficult.

By adapting the old in building the new, Aleksandrov had found a very sensible way of overcoming this problem and fulfilling his task as a Soviet director. This is also evident from his popularity among both the audiences and the authorities. To return to the introduction's opposing genre theories proposed by Lévi-Strauss and Althusser, based on this analysis it appears that Aleksandrov successfully found a balance between the two worlds recognized by the theorists. On the one hand he had to abide to Althusser's ideological approach and make his films address the audiences according to the wishes of the state. On the other hand, in order to do this he employed the already existing social customs recognized by Lévi-Strauss, and since Lévi-Strauss also claims these social customs were used for strengthening the unity of the audiences and envisioning their future, there was no contradiction with the demands of the Socialist Realism. The two theories cannot in Aleksandrov's case be be presented as such polar opposites as Altman does. The content of these films was not born either from the audiences or from the state alone. The former would not have

been accepted and the latter would not have gained popularity. Instead mixing both of them seems to have worked.

The pre-revolutionary folklore lived in the Soviet era, and was not completely replaced by the new Soviet folklore that started forming in the 1920s and 1930s. This does not only make using it a sensible choice for a director who wants to reach millions of people familiar with it, but also affects the director himself. Aleksandrov as a Russian born in 1903 was as much part of this culture as his audiences. While a pure coincidence can at this point of the study be discarded as a valid explanation, it would also be a faulty approach to assume Aleksandrov to be so cold and calculating propagandist that he could have detached himself from this culture completely and implemented every folkloric aspect of his films intentionally to serve ulterior motives. He was an artist who wanted to tell a story, and there is no reason to assume that using elements of classic Russian stories would not have felt simply natural to him. It might even be asked if Aleksandrov himself was a new man, and if he was not, is an old man truly capable of teaching people how to be new? The depictions of new man and new society seen in these films are the interpretations of Aleksandrov, fitted together with the official censorship and demands, and therefore reflect his choices that are certainly influenced by his persona. Studying some other director's interpretation of this same subject might have yielded different results.

The cinema in the 1930s may still have been vanguard of the new technology, but the films produced with the technology were not, in Aleksandrov's case, the vanguard of a new world. The lessons taught to the old men were for most part not new, but simply adaptations of the old tales. When the initial Soviet surface of these films is scratched a little, they reveal the old world full of Ivan the Fools, devils, saints and *boyars*. Perhaps this reflects the reality. Perhaps the new society and new man in reality were not so new after all in the 1930s. The Soviet attempt to construct an utopia may have in the end been the same utopia the peasants of the pre-revolutionary Russia had been dreaming about already hundreds of years before Lenin or Stalin were born. The eternal world of fairy tales where people were beautiful, equal, ever young and ever energetic. The world where the Tsar was good to the people and where ordinary peasants could achieve wondrous feats. The world where there were no shortages or hardships of everyday life. The world where every Ugly Duckling would in the end get what it deserved, and the evil antagonist would suffer the consequences of poetic justice.

If this world already existed, why create a new one at all?

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